# The ENCHANTED HAT

HAROLD MACGRATH

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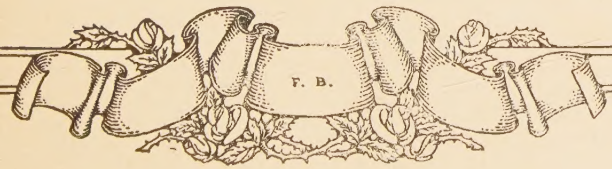
INDIANAPOLIS
THE BOBBS-MERRILL COMPANY
PUBLISHERS



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SEPTEMBER

PRESS OF
BRAUNWORTH & CO.
BOOKBINDERS AND PRINTERS
BROOKLYN, N. Y.

*To*

Marjorie and Walter Trumbull

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IT was half-after six when I entered Martin's from the Broadway side. I chose a table by the north wall and sat down on the cushioned seat. I ordered dinner, and the ample proportions of it completely hoodwinked the waiter as to the condition of my cardiac affliction: being, as I was, desperately and hopelessly and miserably in love. Old owls say that a man can not eat when he is in love. He can if he is mad at the way the object of his affections has treated him; and I was mad. To be

sure, I can not recall what my order was, but the amount of the waiter's check is still vivid to my recollection.

I glanced about. The café was crowded, as it usually is at this hour. Here and there I caught glimpses of celebrities and familiar faces: journalists, musicians, authors, artists and actors. This is the time they drop in to be pointed out to strangers from out of town. It's a capital advertisement. To-night, however, none of these interested me in the slightest degree; rather, their animated countenances angered me. How *could* they laugh and look happy!

At my left sat a young man about my own age. He was also in evening dress. At my right a benevolent old gentle-

man, whose eye-glasses balanced neatly upon the end of his nose, was deeply interested in *The Law Journal* and a pint of mineral water. A little beyond my table was an exiled Frenchman, and the irritating odor of absinthe drifted at times across my nostrils.

With my coffee I ordered a glass of Dantzic, and watched the flakes of beaten gold waver and settle; and presently I devoted myself entirely to my own particularly miserable thoughts. . . . To be in love and in debt! To be with the gods one moment and hunted by a bill-collector the next! To have the girl you love snub and dismiss you for no more lucid reason than that you did not attend the dance at the

Country Club when you promised you would! It did not matter that you had a case on that night from which depended a large slice of your bread and butter; no, that did not matter. Neither did the fact that you had mixed the dates. You had promised to go, and you hadn't gone or notified the girl that you wouldn't go. Your apologetic telegram she had torn into halves and returned the following morning, together with a curt note to the effect that she could not value the friendship of a man who made and broke a promise so easily. It was all over. It was a dashed hard world. How the deuce do you win a girl, anyhow?

Suppose, besides, that you possessed

a rich uncle who said that on the day of your wedding he would make over to you fifty thousand in Government three per cents. Hard, wasn't it? Suppose that you were earning about two thousand a year, and that the struggle to keep up smart appearances was a keen one. Wouldn't you have been eager to marry, especially the girl you loved? A man can not buy flowers twice a week, dine before and take supper after the theater twice a week, belong (and pay dues and house-accounts) to a country club, a town club and keep respectable bachelor apartments on two thousand . . . and save anything. And suppose the girl was independently rich. Heigh-ho!

I find that a man needs more money in love than he does in debt. This is not to say that I was ever very hard pressed; but I hated to pay ten dollars "on account" when the total was only twenty. You understand me, don't you? If you don't, somebody who reads this will. Of course, the girl knew nothing about these things. A young man always falls into the fault of magnifying his earning capacity to the girl he loves. You see, I hadn't told her yet that I loved her, though I was studying up somebody on Moral and Physical Courage for that purpose.

And now it was all over!

I did not care so much about my uncle's gold-bonds, but I did think a

powerful lot of the girl. Why, when I recall the annoyances I've put up with from that kid brother of hers! . . . Pshaw, what's the use?

His mother called him "Toddy-One-Boy," in memory of a book she had read long years ago. He was six years old, and I never think of him without that jingle coming to mind:

"Little Willie choked his sister,
She was dead before they missed her.
Willie's always up to tricks.
Ain't he cute, he's only six!"

He had the face of a Bouguereau cherub, and mild blue eyes such as we are told inhabit the countenances of angels. He was the most innocent-looking chap you ever set eyes on. His

mother called him an angel; I should hate to tell you what the neighbors called him. He lacked none of that subtle humor so familiar in child-life. Heavens! the deeds I could (if I dared) enumerate. They turned him loose among the comic supplements one Sunday, and after that it was all over.

Hadn't he emptied his grandma's medicine capsules and substituted cotton? And hadn't dear old grandma come down-stairs three days later, saying that she felt much improved? Hadn't he beaten out the brains of his toy bank and bought up the peanut man on the corner? Yes, indeed! And hadn't he taken my few letters from his sister's desk and played postman up and

down the street? His papa thought it all a huge joke till one of the neighbors brought back a dunning dressmaker's bill that had lain on the said neighbor's porch. It was altogether a different matter then. Toddy-One-Boy crawled under the bed that night, and only his mother's tears saved him from a hiding.

All these things I thought over as I sat at my table. She knew that I would have gone had it been possible. Women and logic are only cousins german. Six months ago I hadn't been in love with any one but myself, and now the Virgil of love's dream was leading me like a new Dante through *his* Inferno, and was pointing out the foster-brother of Sisyphus (if he had a foster-

brother), pushing the stone of my lady's favor up the steeps of Forlorn Hope. Well, I would go up to the club, and if I didn't get home till mor-r-ning, who was there to care?

The Frenchman had gone, and the benevolent old gentleman. The crowd was thinning out. The young man at my left rose, and I rose also. We both stared thoughtfully at the hat-rack. There hung two hats: an opera-hat and a dilapidated old stovepipe. The young fellow reached up and, quite naturally, selected the opera-hat. He glanced into it, and immediately a wrinkle of annoyance darkened his brow. He held the hat toward me.

"Is this yours?" he asked.

I looked at the label.

"No." The wrinkle of annoyance sprang from his brow to mine. My opera-hat had cost me eight dollars.

The young fellow laughed rather lamely. "Do you live in New York?" he asked.

I nodded.

"So do I," he continued; "and yet it is evident that both of us have been neatly caught." He thought for a moment, then brightened. "I'll tell you what; let's match for the good one."

I gazed indignantly at the rusty stovepipe. "Done!" said I.

I lost; I knew that I should; and the young fellow walked off with the good hat. Then, with the relic in my hand, a

waiter and myself began a systematic search. My hat was nowhere to be found. How the deuce was I to get uptown to the club? I couldn't wear the old plug; I wasn't rich enough for such an eccentricity. I had nothing but a silk hat at the apartment, and I hated it because it was always in the way when I entered carriages and elevators.

Angrily, I strode up to the cashier's desk and explained the situation, leaving my address and the number of my apartment; my name wasn't necessary.

Troubles never come singly. Here I had lost my girl and my hat, to say nothing of my temper—of the three the most certain to be found again. I passed out of the café, bareheaded and

hot-headed. I hailed a cab and climbed in. I had finally determined to return to my rooms and study. I simply could not afford to be seen with that stove-pipe hat either on my head or under my arm. Had I been green from college it is probable that I should have worn it proudly and defiantly. But I had left college behind these six years.

Hang these old duffers who are so absent-minded! For I was confident that the benevolent old gentleman was the cause of all this confusion. Inside the cab I tried on the thing, just to get a picture in my mind of the old gentleman going it up Broadway with my opera-hat on his head. The hat sagged over my ears; and I laughed. The pic-

ture I had conjured up was too much for my anger, which vanished suddenly. And once I had laughed I felt a trifle more agreeable toward the world. So long as a man can see the funny side of things he has no active desire to leave life behind; and laughter does more to lighten his sorrows than sympathy, which only aggravates them.

After all, the old gentleman would feel the change more sharply than I. This was, in all probability, the only hat he had. I turned it over and scrutinized it. It was a genteel old beaver, with an air of respectability that was quite convincing. There was nothing smug about it, either. It suggested

amiability in the man who had recently possessed it. It suggested also a mild contempt for public opinion, which is always a sign of superior mentality and advanced years. I began to draw a mental portrait of the old man. He was a family lawyer, doubtless, who lived in the past and hugged his retrospections. When we are young there is never any vanishing point to our day-dreams. Well, well! On the morrow he would have a new hat, of approved shape and pattern; unless, indeed, he possessed others like this which had fallen into my keeping. Perhaps he would soon discover his mistake, return to the café and untangle the snarl. I sincerely hoped he would. As I re-

marked, my hat had cost me eight dollars.

I soon arrived at my apartments, and got into a smoking-jacket. I rather delight in lolling around in a dress-shirt; it looks so like the pictures we see in the fashionable novels. I picked up Blackstone and turned to his "promissory notes." I had two or three out myself. It was nine o'clock when the hall-boy's bell rang, and I placed my ear to the tube. A gentleman wished to see me in regard to a lost hat.

"Send him up, James; send him up!" I bawled down the tube. Visions of the club returned, and I tossed Blackstone into a corner.

Presently there came a tap on the

door, and I flung it wide. But my visitor was not the benevolent old gentleman. He was the Frenchman whose absinthe had offended me. He glanced at the slip of paper in his hand.

"I have zee honaire to address zee—ah—gentleman in numbaire six?"

"I live here."

"Delight'! We have meexed zee hats, I have zee r-r-regret. Ees thees your hat?" He held out, for my inspection, an opera-hat. "I am *so* absent-mind'—what you call deestrait?"—affably.

I took the hat, which at first glance I thought to be mine, and went over to the rack, taking down the old stove-pipe.

"This is yours, then?" I said, smiling.

"Thousand thanks, m'sieu! Eet ees certain mine. I have zee honaire to beg pardon for zee confusion. My compliments! Good night!"

Without giving the hat a single glance, he clapped it on his head, bowed and disappeared, leaving me his card. He hadn't been gone two minutes when I discovered that the hat he had exchanged for the stovepipe was *not* mine. It came from the same firm, but the initials proved it without doubt to belong to the young fellow I had met at the table. I said some uncomplimentary things. Where the deuce *was* my hat? Evidently the benevolent old

gentleman hadn't discovered his mistake yet.

Ting-a-ling! It was the boy's bell again.

"Well?"

"Another man after a hat. What's goin' on?"

"Send him up!" I yelled. It came over me that the Frenchman had made a second mistake.

I was not disappointed this time in my visitor. It was the benevolent old gentleman. Evidently he had not located *his* hat either, and might not for some time to come. I began to believe that I had carelessly given it to the Frenchman. He seemed to be terribly excited.

"You are the gentleman who occupies number six?"

"Yes, sir. This is my apartment. You have come in regard to a hat?"

"Yes, sir. My name is Chittenden. Our hats got mixed up at Martin's this evening; my fault, as usual. I am always doing something absurd, my memory is so bad. When I discovered my mistake I was calling on the family of a client with whom I had spent most of the afternoon. I missed some valuable papers, legal documents. I believed as usual that I had forgotten to take them with me. They were nowhere to be found at the house. My client has a very mischievous son, and it seems that he stuffed the papers be-

hind the inside band of my hat. With them there was a letter. I have had two very great scares. A great deal of trouble would ensue if the papers were lost. I just telephoned that I had located the hat." He laughed pleasantly.

Good heavens! here was a howdy-do.

"My dear Mr. Chittenden, there has been a great confusion," I faltered. "I had your hat, but—but you have come too late."

"Too late?" he roared, or I should say, to be exact, shouted.

"Yes, sir."

"What have you done with it?"

"Not five minutes ago I gave it to a Frenchman, who seemed to recognize it as his. It was the Frenchman, if you

will remember, who sat near your table in the café."

"And this hat isn't yours, then?"—helplessly.

"This" was a flat-brimmed hat of the Paris boulevards, the father of all stovepipe hats, dear to the Frenchman's heart.

"Candidly, now," said I with a bit of excusable impatience, "do I look like a man who would wear a hat like that?"

He surveyed me miserably through his eye-glasses.

"No, I can't say that you do. But what in the world am I to do?" He mopped his brow in the ecstasy of anguish. "The hat must be found. The

legal papers could be replaced, but . . . You see, sir, that boy put a private letter of his sister's in the band of that hat, and it must be recovered at all hazards."

"I am very sorry, sir."

"But what shall I do?"

"I do not see what can be done save for you to leave word at the café. The Frenchman is doubtless a frequenter, and may easily be found. If you had come a few moments sooner . . ."

With a gurgle of dismay he fled, leaving me with a half-finished sentence hanging on my lips and the Frenchman's chapeau hanging on my fingers. And *my* hat; where was *my* hat? (I may as well add here, in

parenthesis, that the disappearance of my eight-dollar hat still remains a mystery. I have had to buy a new one.)

So the boy had put a letter of his sister's in the band of the hat, I mused. How like *her* kid brother! It seemed that more or less families had Toddy-One-Boys to look after. Pshaw! what a muddle because a man couldn't keep his thoughts from wool-gathering!

Well, here I had two hats, neither of which was mine. I could, at a pinch, wear the opera-hat, as it was the exact size of the one I had lost. But what was to be done with the Frenchman's? . . . Fool that I was! I rushed over to the table. The Frenchman had left his card, and I had forgotten all about

it. And I hadn't asked the benevolent old gentleman where he lived. The Frenchman's card read: "M. de Beausire, No. — Washington Place." I decided to go myself to the address, state the matter to Monsieur de Beausire, and rescue the letter. I knew all about these Toddy-One-Boys, and I might be doing some girl a signal service.

I looked at my watch. It was closing on to ten. So I reluctantly got into my coat again, drew on a top-coat, and put on the hat that fitted me. Probably the girl had been writing some fortunate fellow a love-letter. No gentleman will ever overlook a chance to do a favor for a young girl in distress. I had scarcely drawn my stick from the um-

brella-jar when the bell rang once again.

"Hello!" I called down the tube. Why couldn't they let me be?

"Lady wants to see you, sir."

"A lady!"

"Yes, sir. A real lady; l-a-d-y. She says she's come to see the gentleman in number six about a plug-hat. What's the graft, anyway?"

"A plug-hat!"

"Yes, sir; a plug-hat. She seems a bit anxious. Shall I send her up? She's a peach."

"Yes, send her up," I answered feebly enough.

And now there was a woman in the case! I wiped the perspiration from

my brow and wondered what I should say to her. A woman. . . . By Jove! the sister of the mischievous boy! Old Chittenden must have told her where he had gone, and as he hasn't shown up, she's worried. It must be a tremendously important letter to cause all this hubbub. So I laid aside my hat and waited, tugging and gnawing at my mustache. . . . Had the Girl acted reasonably I shouldn't have gone to Martin's that night.

How easy it is for a woman to hurt the man she knows is in love with her! And the Girl had hurt me more than I was willing to confess even to myself. She had implied that I had carelessly broken an engagement.

Soon there came a gentle tapping. Certainly the young woman had abundant pluck. I approached the door quickly, and flung it open.

The Girl herself stood on the threshold, and we stared at each other with bewildered eyes!

## II

She was the most exquisite creature in all the wide world; and here she was, within reach of my hungry arms!

"You?" she cried, stepping back, one hand at her throat and the other against the jamb of the door.

Dumb as ever was Lot's wife (after the turning-point in her career), I stood and stared and admired. A woman would instantly have noticed the beauty of her sables, but I was a man to whom such details were inconsequent.

"I did not expect . . . that is, only the number of the apartment was given," she stammered. "I . . ." Then her slender figure straightened,

and with an effort she subdued the fright and dismay which had evidently seized her. "Have you Mr. Chittenden's hat?"

"Mr. Chittenden's hat?" I repeated, with a tingling in my throat similar to that when you hit your elbow smartly on a sharp corner. "Mr. Chittenden's hat?"

"Yes; he is so thoughtless that I dared not trust him to search for it alone. Have *you* got it?"

Heavens! how my heart beat at the sight of this beautiful being, as she stood there, palpitating between shame and anxiety! She *was* beautiful; and I knew instantly that I loved her better than anything else on earth.

"Mr. Chittenden's hat?" I continued, as lucidly as a trained parrot and in tones not wholly dissimilar.

"Can't you say anything more than that?"—impatiently.

How much more easily a woman recovers her poise than a man, especially when that man gives himself over as tamely as I did!

"Was it *your* letter he was seeking?" I cried, all eagerness and excitement as this one sane thought entered my head.

"Did he tell you that there was a letter in it?"—scornfully.

"Yes,"—guiltily. Heaven only knows why I should have had any sense of guilt.

"Give it to me at once,"—imperatively.

"The hat or the letter?" Truly, I did not know what I was about. Only one thing was plain to my confused mind, and that was the knowledge that I wanted to put my arms around her and carry her far, far away from Toddy-One-Boy.

"Are you mad, to anger me in this fashion?" she said, balling her little gloved hands wrathfully. Had there been real lightning in her eyes I'd have been dead this long while. "Do you dare believe that I knew you lived in this apartment?"

"I . . . haven't the hat."

"You dared to search it?"—drawing

herself up to a supreme height, which was something less than five-feet-two.

I became angry, and somehow found myself.

"I never pry into other people's affairs. You are the last person I expected to see this night."

"Will you answer a single question? I promise not to intrude further upon your time, which, doubtless, is very valuable. Have you either the hat or the letter?"

"Neither. I knew nothing about any letter till Mr. Chittenden came. But he came too late."

"Too late?"—in an agonized whisper.

"Yes, too late. I had, unfortunately,

given his hat to another gentleman who made a trifling mistake in thinking it to be his own." Suddenly my manners returned to me. "Will you come in?"

"Come in? No! You have given the hat to another man? A trifling mistake! He calls it a trifling mistake!"—addressing the heavens, obscured though they were by the thickness of several ceilings. "Oh, what *shall* I do?" She began to wring her hands, and when a woman does that what earthly hope is there for the man who looks on?

"Don't do that!" I implored. "I'll find the hat." At a word from her, for all she had trampled on me, I would gladly have gone to Honolulu in search

of a hat-pin. "The gentleman left me his card. With your permission I will go at once in search of him."

"I have a cab outside. Give me the address."

"I refuse to permit you to go alone."

"You have absolutely nothing to say in regard to where I shall or shall not go."

"In this one instance. I shall withhold the address."

How her eyes blazed!

"Oh, it is easily to be seen that you do not trust me." I was utterly discouraged.

"I did not imply that," with the least bit of softening. "Certainly I would trust you. But . . ."

"Well?"—as laughingly as I could.

"I must be the one to take out that letter,"—decidedly.

"I offer to bring you the hat untouched," I replied.

"I insist on going."

"Very well; we shall go together; under no other circumstances. This is a common courtesy that I would show to a perfect stranger."

I put on my derby, took up the Frenchman's card and tile, and bowed her gravely into the main hallway. We did not speak on the way down to the street. We entered the cab in silence, and went rumbling off southwest. When the monotony became positively unbearable I spoke.

"I regret to force myself upon you."

No reply.

"It must be a very important letter."

"To no one but myself,"—with extreme frigidity.

"His father ought to wring his neck,"—thinking of Toddy-One-Boy.

"Sir, he is my brother!"

"I beg your pardon." It seemed that I wasn't getting on very well.

We bumped across the Broadway tracks. Once or twice our shoulders touched, and the thrill I experienced was as painful as it was rapturous. What was in a letter that she should go to this extreme to recall it? A heat-flash of jealousy went over me. She had written to some other fellow; for there

always is some other fellow, hang him! . . . And then a grand idea came into my erstwhile stupid head. Here she was, alone with me in a cab. It was the opportunity of a lifetime. I could force her to listen to my explanation.

"I received your note," I began. "It was cruel and without justice."

Her chin went up a degree.

"The worst criminal is not condemned without a hearing, and I have had none."

No perceptible movement.

"We are none of us infallible in keeping appointments. We are liable to make mistakes occasionally. Had I known that Tuesday night was the night of the dance I'd have crossed to

Jersey in a rowboat but what I'd have kept my engagement."

The chin remained precipitously inclined.

"I am poor, and the case involved some of my bread and butter. The work was done at ten, and even then I did not discover that I had in any way affronted you. I had it down in my note-book as Wednesday night."

The lips above the chin curled slightly.

"You see," I went on, striving to keep my voice even-toned, "my uncle is rich, but I ask no odds of him. I live entirely upon what I earn at law. It's the only way I can maintain my individuality, my self-respect and in-

dependence. My uncle has often expressed his desire to make me a handsome allowance, but what would be the use of all that . . . now?"—bitterly.

The chin moved a little. It was too dark to see what this movement expressed.

"It seems that I am only a very unfortunate fellow."

"You had given me your promise."

"I know it."

"Not that I cared,"—with cat-like cruelty; "but I lost the last train out while waiting for you. Not even a note to warn me! Not the slightest chance to find an escort! When a man gives his promise to a lady it does not seem pos-

sible that he could forget it . . . if he cared to keep it."

"I tell you honestly that I mixed the dates." How weak my excuses seemed, now that they had passed my lips!

"You are sure that you mixed nothing else?"—ironically. (She afterward apologized for this.) "It appears that it would have been better to come alone."

"I regret I did not give you the address."

"It is not too late."

"I never retreat from any position I have taken."

"Indeed?"

Then both our chins assumed an acute angle and remained thus. When

a woman is angry she is about as reasonable as a frightened horse; when a man is angry he longs to hit something or smoke a cigar. Imagine my predicament!

When the cab reached Washington Place and came to a stand I spoke again.

"Shall I take the hat in, or will you?" I asked.

"We shall go together."

Ah, if only I had had the courage to say: "I would it were for ever!" But I feared that it wouldn't take.

I rang the bell, and presently a maid opened the door.

"Is Monsieur de Beausire in?" I asked.

"No, sir, he is not," the maid answered civilly.

"Do you know where he may be found?"

"If you have a bill you may leave it," —frostily and with sudden suspicion.

There was a smothered sound from behind me, and I flushed angrily.

"I am not a bill-collector."

"Oh; it's the second day of the month, you know. I thought perhaps you were."

"He has in his possession a hat which does not belong to him."

"Good gracious, he hasn't been *stealing?* I don't believe"—making as though to shut the door.

This was too much, and I laughed.

"No, my girl; he hasn't been stealing. But, being absent-minded, he has taken another man's hat, and I am bringing his home in hopes of getting the one he took by mistake."

"Oh!" And the maid laughed shrilly.

I held out the hat.

"My land! that's his hat, sure enough. I was wondering what made him look so funny when he went out."

"Where has he gone?" came sharply over my shoulder.

"If you will wait," said the maid good-naturedly, "I will inquire."

We waited. So far as I was concerned, I hoped he was miles away, and that we might go on riding for

hours and hours. The maid returned soon.

"He has gone to meet the French consul at Mouquin's."

"Which one?" I asked. "There are two, one down- and one up-town."

"I'm sure I don't know. You can leave the hat and your card."

"Thank you; we shall retain the hat. If we find monsieur he will need it."

"I'm sorry," said the maid sympathetically. "He's the worst man you ever saw for forgetting things. Sometimes he goes right by the house and has to walk back."

"I'm sorry to have bothered you," said I; and the only girl in the world and myself reëntered the cab.

"This is terrible!" she murmured as we drove off.

"It might be worse," I replied, thinking of the probable long ride with her: perhaps the last I should ever take!

"How could it be!"

I had nothing to offer, and subsided for a space.

"If we should not find him!"

"I'll sit on his front steps all night . . . Forgive me if I sound flippant; but I mean it." Snow was in the air, and I considered it a great sacrifice on my part to sit on a cold stone in the small morning hours. It looks flippant in print, too, but I honestly meant it. "I am sorry. You are in great trouble of some sort, I know; and there's noth-

ing in the world I would not do to save you from this trouble. Let me take you home and continue the search alone. I'll find him if I have to search the whole town."

"We shall continue the search together,"—wearily.

What had she written to this other fellow? *Did* she love some one else and was she afraid that I might learn who it was? My heart became as lead in my bosom. I simply could not lose this charming creature. And now, how was I ever to win her?

It was not far up-town to the restaurant, and we made good time.

"Would you know him if you saw him?" she asked as we left the cab.

"Not the least doubt of it,"—confidently.

She sighed, and together we entered the restaurant. It was full of theater-going people, music and the hum of voices. We must have created a small sensation, wandering from table to table, from room to room, the girl with a look of dread and weariness on her face, and I with the Frenchman's hat grasped firmly in my hand and my brows scowling. If I hadn't been in love it would have been a fine comedy. Once I surprised her looking toward the corner table near the orchestra. How many joyous Sunday dinners we had had there! Heigh-ho!

"Is that he?" she whispered, clutch-

ing my arm of a sudden, her gaze directed to a near-by table.

I looked and shook my head.

"No; my Frenchman has a mustache and a goatee."

Her hand dropped listlessly. I confess to the thought that it must have been very trying for her. What a plucky girl she was! She held me in contempt, and yet she clung to me, patiently and unmurmuring. And I had lost her!

"We may have to go down-town. . . . No! as I live, there he is now!" —joyfully.

"Where?" There was half a sob in her throat.

"The table by the short flight of stairs

. . . the man just lighting the cigarette. I'll go alone."

"But I can not stand here alone in the middle of the floor. . . ."

I called a waiter. "Give this lady a chair for a moment;" and I dropped a coin in his palm. He bowed, and beckoned for her to follow. . . . Women are always writing fool things, and then moving Heaven and earth to recall them.

"Monsieur de Beausire?" I said inquiringly.

Beausire glanced up.

"Oh, eet ees . . . I forget zee name?"

I told him.

"I am delight'!" he cried joyfully, as

if he had known me all my life. "Zee chair; be seat' . . ."

"Thank you, but it's about the hats."

"Hats?"

"Yes. It seems that the hat I gave you belongs to another man. In your haste you did not notice the mistake. *This* is your hat,"—producing the shining tile.

*"Mon Dieu!"* he gasped, seizing the hat; "eet *ees* mine! See! I bring heem from France; zee *nom* ees mine. *V'là!* And I nevaire look in zee uzzer hat! I am *pair*-fickly dumfound'!" And his astonishment was genuine.

"Where is the other hat: the one I gave you?" I was in a great hurry.

"I have heem here," reaching to the

vacant chair at his side, while the French consul eyed us both with some suspicion. We *might* be lunatics. Beausire handed me the benevolent old gentleman's hat, and the burden dropped from my shoulders. "Eet ees *such* a meestake! I laugh; eh?" He shook with merriment. "I wear *two* hats and not know zee meestake!"

I thanked him and made off as gracefully as I could. The girl rose as she saw me returning. When I reached her side she was standing with her slender body inclined toward me. She stretched forth a hand and solemnly I gave her Mr. Chittenden's hat. I wondered vaguely if anybody was looking at us, and, if so, what he thought of us.

The girl pulled the hat literally inside out in her eagerness; but her gloved fingers trembled so that the precious letter fluttered to the floor. We both stooped, but I was quicker. It was no attempt on my part to see the address; my act was one of common politeness. But I could not help seeing the name. It was my own!

"Give it to me!" she cried breathlessly.

I did so. I was not, at that particular moment, capable of doing anything else. I was too bewildered. My own name! She turned, hugging the hat, the legal documents and the letter, and hurried down the main stairs, I at her heels.

"Tell the driver my address; I can return alone."

"I can not permit that," I objected decidedly. "The driver is a stranger to us both. I insist on seeing you to the door; after that you may rest assured that I shall no longer inflict upon you my presence, odious as it doubtless is to you."

As she was already in the cab and could not get out without aid, I climbed in beside her and called the street and number to the driver.

"Legally the letter is mine; it is addressed to me, and had passed out of your keeping."

"You shall never, never have it!"—vehemently.

"It is not necessary that I should," I replied; "for I vaguely understand."

I saw that it was all over. There was now no reason why I should not speak my mind fully.

"I can understand without reading. You realized that your note was cruel and unlike anything you had done, and your good heart compelled you to write an apology; but your pride got the better of you, and upon second thought you concluded to let the unmerited hurt go on."

"Will you kindly stop the driver, or shall I?"

"Does truth annoy you?"

"I decline to discuss truth with you. Will you stop the driver?"

"Not until we reach Seventy-first Street West."

"By what right—"

"The right of a man who loves you. There, it is out, and my pride has gone down the wind. After to-night I shall trouble you no further. But every man has the right to tell one woman that he loves her; and I love you. I loved you the moment I first laid eyes on you. I couldn't help it. I say this to you now because I perceive how futile it is. What dreams I have conjured up about you! Poor fool! When I was at work your face was always crossing the page or peering up from the margins. I never saw a fine painting that I did not think of you, or heard a fine piece of

music that I did not think of your voice."

There was a long interval of silence; block after block went by. I never once looked at her.

"If I had been rich I should have put it to the touch some time ago; but my poverty seems to have been fortunate; it has saved me a refusal. In some way I have mortally offended you; how, I can not imagine. It can not be simply because I innocently broke an engagement."

Then she spoke.

"You dined after the theater that night with a comic-opera singer. You were quite at liberty to do so, only you might have done me the honor to no-

tify me that you had made your choice of entertainment."

So it was out! Decidedly it was all over now. I never could explain away the mistake.

"I have already explained to you my unfortunate mistake. There was and is no harm that I can see in dining with a woman of her attainments. But I shall put up no defense. You have convicted me. I retract nothing I have said. I *do* love you."

I was very sorry for myself.

Cabby drew up. I alighted, and she silently permitted me to assist her down. I expected her immediately to mount the steps. Instead, she hesitated, the knuckle of a forefinger against her

lips, and assumed the thoughtful pose of one who contemplates two courses.

"Have you a stamp?" she asked finally.

"A stamp?"—blankly.

"Yes; a postage-stamp."

I fumbled in my pocket and found, luckily, a single pink square, which I gave to her. She moistened it with the tip of her tongue and . . . stuck it on the letter!

"Now, please, drop this in the corner box for me, and take this hat over to Mr. Chittenden's—Sixty-ninth."

"What—"

"Do as I say, or I shall ask you to return the letter to me."

I rushed off toward the letter-box,

drew down the lid, and deposited the letter—my letter. When I turned she was running up the steps, and a second later she had disappeared.

I hadn't been so happy in all my life!

Cabby waited at the curb.

Suddenly I became conscious that I was holding something in my hand. It was the benevolent old gentleman's stovepipe hat!

I pushed the button: pushed it good and hard. Presently I heard a window open cautiously.

"What is it?" asked a querulous voice.

"Mr. Chittenden?"

"Yes."

"Well, here's your hat!" I cried.

# THE WRONG COAT

IF it hadn't rained at Waterloo Napoleon might not have sunk to the obscure fame of a cigar label; if Lot's wife (whose name, at this particular moment, I fail to recollect) hadn't looked around, many's the humorist who would be shy sundry half dollars; if Ulysses hadn't met Calypso, Penelope's knitting would have been accomplished in a reasonably small compass of time: thus, if, on the morning of March tenth, a blizzard hadn't romped in from the Atlantic, there wouldn't have been any wrong coat. The day

before had been treacherously warm and springlike, and I had gone about my affairs without any coat. It is always the seemingly infinitesimal things that count heaviest in the final reckoning.

I hadn't gone two blocks from Mouquin's that night, when I noted the fact that I was wearing a coat that did not belong to me. With a growl I turned around and went back. I simply wasted my time; my coat was nowhere to be found. I stormed about, sending the waiters jumping all over the restaurant, but to no avail. Finally I calmed down and admitted that it was all my own fault. I should have examined the coat when I shouldered into it. So I left

word at the cashier's desk and sought the street again.

Doubtless you have lost a coat or hat, in your time, if you who read happen to be a man. It is curious, but, no matter how much you are bettered in the exchange, you raise a howl,—you make the echoes ache with your lamentations. There is nothing on earth you want save your own coat and hat. To be sure, if, in the pockets of the wrong coat, there happen to be several thousand dollars, your howl is modified and innocuous, and you go at once to look for the other fellow,—perhaps. But, as in this instance there were only thirty-five cents, a canceled railroad ticket, and a scattering of cloves and tabloids

for the breath, my cries were heard afar. Hang all absent-minded duffers, myself included, whose wits go woolgathering at bad times! The coat was just like mine, a light gray winter paddock, lined with heavy satin. The only difference lay in the sleeves: these had small-change pockets, whereas mine had none. It was even exchange and no robbery, but I was none the less angry. The truth is, it was just after the first of the month and there were four or five unpaid bills in the inside pocket of *my* coat. (One was the bill for the coat!) So I climbed the stairs to the elevated station in no amiable frame of mind. Well, well; it really did not matter if the gentleman who had ap-

propriated my coat learned that I owed my tailor. To owe one's tailor as long as the law permits is quite customary, —not only customary, but also proper and commendable. The other bills were for cigars, gloves, and hats; that is to say, of no great importance.

I plumped into a vacant seat and glowered at the street below. It had stopped snowing and the wind had gone down. For once in my life I took no interest in the advertising signs. I wanted my coat, and for all I knew the man who had it might stumble under an automobile and ruin the garment; and, even if he didn't ruin it, it would smell tolerably strong of gasolene. I conjured up all manner of catastrophes

regarding the ultimate end of my coat. The other fellow might be burned up in it; he might fall down a greasy elevator shaft in it; he might even be lugged to jail in it, which was not at all unlikely, the cloves and tabloids speaking not very well of his habits. Was there ever such luck?

Having no newspaper with which to pass away the time, I fell once more to rummaging the wrong coat. As I searched the pockets, my sense of guilt was in nowise agitated. Doubtless the owner was at that moment going through the pockets of *my* coat. Thus, honors were even. But I found nothing by which to identify my man. One's identity can not be established by means

of thirty-five cents, a worthless ticket, and a few cloves. A. Conan Doyle might accomplish such a feat, but I couldn't. . . . Hello! What was this? From the handkerchief pocket I drew forth an envelope; but, as I glanced at it, my hopes slumped. The address side was missing; only the sealing-flaps remained. I was about to toss it contemptuously into the aisle, when I discovered that it was covered with pencil scribblings. . . . Merciful heavens! I held the thing under my very nose and read, with horrified eyes:

"Girl must die between twelve and one o'clock.

Chloroform,—

Bow-window at side unlatched,—enter there.

Safe in library. Secure will. Leave by front door.

Servants' night out.—Girl alone."

Mystery! I sat up straight and breathed quickly. I saw it all very plainly. Fate had thrust this coat upon me; Fate had given me a mission; I might be the means of saving the girl's life. I was an amateur detective, after a fashion, and more than once, in the old newspaper days, I had succeeded where the police had failed.

In a far corner of the envelope was a house address. Without doubt it was the very house in which this murder

was to be committed. I glanced at my watch. It was eleven o'clock. There was plenty of time. . . . Or, had the crime already been perpetrated? I shuddered. It was left for me to find out. "Servants' night out," I thought. This might or might not be servants' night out. In any event I should have the happiness of confounding a great rascal. From the address I learned that the house was located in a particularly aristocratic part of the West Side. But why should he kill the girl? Ha! I had it. There was a will. No doubt she stood between! With the girl dead, the property would fall to him. It sounded like a play at the Fourteenth Street Theater; but, in real life, the melo-

drama is closest to our every-day affairs.

I at once determined not to notify the police; they would only bungle the matter with the red tape of delay. I could call them in when the work was over.

And to think that this ruffian's taste in overcoats was one and identical with mine! I had half a notion to tear off the coat, only it would have attracted attention,—and, besides, it was cold.

Some men would have shrugged their shoulders and permitted the thing to go on. In a great city the good Samaritan is usually looked upon as a meddler; and, besides, every one has trouble enough of his own. The girl

was nothing to me; even her name was unknown. I hoped, however, that she was beautiful and young. My duty lay clear enough. It was possible to save a human being, and that was all there was to the matter. Any right-minded man would have done exactly as I did, though hardly with the same result. (This is not to say that I'm not right-minded, however!) If I should save the girl from her persecutor, I should always have something to fall back on if by any chance I myself left the straight and narrow way. To save a life is to do penance for many sins.

Putting aside all flippant moralizing, it was an adventure such as invariably appeals to me, and it is a

habit of mine to pursue things to the end. It is a fine and noble pursuit, that of research; it takes courage and patience. But sometimes, as in cases like this adventure of mine, persons lacking my sense of the romantic are called busybodies.

I do not recollect what street it was in the eighties that the guard bawled out, but it was near enough for my purpose. I hurried out of the car and down the steps of the Elevated. Everybody gets in the way of a man in a hurry; so, for a block or more, the time was spent in making apologies to gruff-tempered persons. They *would* get in my way, and they *would* demand what I meant by not looking where I was go-

ing. Finally I succeeded in ridding myself of the crowds, and turned into a quiet and sober street. The sign on the lamp-post told me that I had arrived on the scene. It was twenty minutes past eleven. Two things were possible: either the girl had been killed the night before or I had half an hour or so in which to render her the greatest possible service.

The house proved to be a fine structure, one of those few dwellings in the metropolis that boast of anything like a court or yard. This yard was at the right of the building, and was more a roadway to the stables in the rear than anything else. Still, I may stretch it a point and call it a yard. I cast a hasty

glance about. Not a soul was in sight. I tried one of the gates. It was unlatched! This certainly must be the night. I stole up the roadway cautiously. The fact that I left some fine tracks in the snow did not disturb me. *I* was not guilty of anything wrong. Yes, there was the bow-window through which the rascal was to enter. There would be a surprise in store for him. A subdued light shone through the half-closed blinds. Some one was awake; doubtless the girl herself, reading.

Everything was working out nicely. I would even save her any real annoyance.

I tiptoed back to the gate, and was

about to make my exit, when I paused, horrified, my heart in my mouth. Coming airily along the walk was a policeman. He was whistling popular Irish melodies and swinging his night-stick. The deuce! Suppose he took it into his head to examine the gates? I hid behind the great stone gate-post, breathing with difficulty. If there was anything in the world I did *not* want to happen, it was to be arrested in this other fellow's coat! Besides the policeman wouldn't believe a word I said. He would hale me to the nearest police station, and all my efforts to save the girl would come to nothing.

The policeman *did* start for the gate, but a cat-fight across the street dis-

tracted him and he crossed over to break up the conflict. I was saved. After a reasonable length of time, I stole forth. It was a close shave.

I dare say that I have omitted the fact that I am young, still under thirty, and am a struggling dramatist, after having been a struggling poet, into which craft I had drifted after having been a struggling humorist. The main fault of my want of success I lay to the fact that I do not look the various parts. As a dramatist, I lack the requisite irritability of temper; as a poet, I have not that distinct disregard for personal appearance usually considered characteristic; as a humorist, I am totally deficient of the long, cadaverous and

dyspeptic countenance and lusterless eye of the typical writer of funny fancies. When my uncle died and left me a comfortable income, Art received a staggering blow, from which it is doubtful she will ever recover. A spinster aunt insists that I am more than ordinarily agreeable to the eye; but, of course, blood is partial to blood. That is enough for the present of what the amiable Thackeray called "first person, singular, perpendicular."

When once more in the street, I boldly approached the steps, mounted slowly, and pushed the button. If a maid or a footman should open the door, I should know instantly that it was not servants' night off. It remained

only for the girl herself to answer my summons.

This she did.

I remarked, elsewhere, that I hoped she would be young and beautiful. She *was*. I wasn't exactly expecting such a vision of loveliness. Her hair was like golden cobwebs, her eyes like sapphires, and her complexion had the shadowy bloom of a young peach. I stared, standing first on one foot, then on the other.

"What is it?" she asked, rather impatiently.

It was quite evident that she had been deeply absorbed in the book she held in her hand. I wondered how I should begin!

"Well, sir?"

"Are you the young lady of the house?" I finally summoned up the courage to ask.

"Yes." The door moved perceptibly —toward me.

"I have, then, something of vital importance to tell you."

"Call to-morrow morning," she replied briefly. The door continued to move in my direction.

I saw that I must act quickly, or turn the matter over to the police, which I was exceedingly loath to do.

"It is a matter of life and death," I said determinedly.

"Life and death? Whose?" she asked, with discouraging brevity.

Then she cried suddenly: "Has anything happened to my brother?"

"Brother? Not that I know. It is *you!*"

"What?" She inclined toward me, and for a moment the door ceased to gravitate outward.

"You possess a terrible enemy, known or unknown."

"An enemy? . . . I haven't the least idea, sir, what the meaning of this hoax can—"

"Hoax!" I interrupted. "It isn't a hoax; it is frightfully serious, as you will soon learn, if you will only be so kind as to give me a few moments of your attention."

There spread over her beautiful face

various shades of amazement, indignation, and fear. Hoax! It was, indeed, a very ungrateful world. Decidedly, this time, the girl meant to close the door in my face. Resolutely, I shouldered past her into the hall!

"How dare you?" she cried, her wonderful eyes blazing and wrath dyeing her cheeks. "If you do not instantly go, I shall call for help. How dare you?"

"This is servants' night out, and your aunt is away," I said, intending to tell her all at once.

But she suddenly drew back against the wall and gazed at me as if for all the world I resembled the uprising of Jason's dragon-teeth.

"What do you want?" she asked, in a panting whisper. "There isn't a penny in the house!"

Goodness! if the girl didn't take me for a burglar!

"Do you think I'm a burglar?" I gasped.

"But,"—piteously.

"I am simply here to do you a service; and it *is* a service."

"There are no jewels save these rings. Take them and go." She stripped her fingers and held the rings toward me.

I flushed hotly. "Will you do me the honor to listen to me?" I asked, as calmly as I could. "Put back those rings; otherwise I shall regret that I

took it upon myself to befriend you. I am *not* a burglar."

She complied, but the terror in her eyes subsided none. (I learned afterward that several robberies had recently been committed in the neighborhood.)

"At a restaurant, to-night," I began, "I got another man's coat by mistake. In a pocket of this coat I found evidence that a terrible crime was about to be perpetrated. I came here to aid you."

She stared at me wildly and fumbled her rings.

"You have," I continued, "a deadly enemy, a wretch who wishes to put you out of the way. You may not know who

he is, but none the less he exists. You stand between him and a will. It is money, the greed of it, that brings him like a wolf to your door. According to my information, he is to enter here between the hours of twelve and one, chloroform you, and pilfer the safe. He knows the habits of this household well, for he is aware that on this night neither your aunt nor your servants would be in."

She still eyed me with unchanging terror.

"It was only human on my part," I went on, "to make known to you what I had found."

Suddenly an inexplicable change came over her.

"'Yes, yes; I see, I understand! Thank you! Oh, thank you!" hysterically. "Come into the drawing-room and sit down. I have been dreading this moment for months!"

Dreading it for months? And yet she remained alone in this big house? I was vastly puzzled; but I followed her into the drawing-room and sat down, waiting for a further explanation on her part. She was a rarely beautiful creature, and the idea that any man could harbor thoughts against this exquisite life filled my soul with horror.

"The will is in the safe, but the safe is in the library. Wait till I go and see if the papers are intact." She hurried

from the room, leaving me with a sense of utter bewilderment. There was something about her present actions that I could not understand. She was gone fully five minutes. When she returned she was very pale, but all her agitation was gone or suppressed. "The will is there; nothing, as yet, has been disturbed. Tell me all you know," —looking anxiously at the clock, the hands of which were now close upon midnight.

I reviewed the whole affair.

"Yes, I *have* a terrible enemy, who seeks my life at every turn,"—her slender fingers snarling and unsnarling.

I nodded comprehensively. "You ought never to be alone," I said.

"I realize that. This will . . . leaves me untold mining property. . . . To my horror I must confess that this man is a near relative."

"Your brother?" I whispered.

"Heavens, no! A cousin; yes, that is it, a cousin. I live from day to day in constant misery."

"Frightful!"

"Is it not? And I am so young!" Then she proceeded to tell me what I believed to be the family history. It was marvelously complicated.

"It seems incredible," I observed; "yet we read of like tales every day in the newspapers."

"And no words of mine can express my thanks to you, sir. You have put

me on my guard. I had heard that my uncle—"

"Uncle?"

"Did I say *uncle?*"—with a catchy sort of laugh. "I meant cousin. I was going to say that I had heard he had left the country."

But why did she watch me so closely? Every move I made caused her to start. When I turned down the collar of the *other* fellow's coat, she shuddered; when I drew off my gloves, she paled; when I folded my arms, she sent a terrified glance toward the door. I could not make any sense out of her actions.

"To prove the manner of his entrance, let me see if the bow-window is

unlatched. But wait!" I cried, producing the frayed envelope. "Listen to this and see how carefully he planned it, the rascal!" I then read to her the scribbling, putting careful emphasis on the bow-window and servants' night out. "Now, if you do not mind, I'll try the window."

Sure enough, it was unlatched!

"You see?" I cried triumphantly.

The wild look returned to the girl's eyes.

"Let—let me see that paper!"—holding one hand to her throat while the other she stretched out toward me.

I gave the paper to her. She glanced at it, dropped it, and burst into tears.

"Good heavens!" I cried.

Then she laughed shrilly and hysterically.

"What is the matter?"

"You positively came here, then, to do me a real service; and all the while I have been thinking that you were a—"

"What?"

"A *lunatic!*"—covering her face.

"A lunatic?" I was absolutely dumfounded.

"Yes; and when I left the room it was simply to call the police. The manner of your entrance,—the incredible thing you told me,—sir, there is some dreadful mistake. I haven't an enemy in the whole world. There is no will in the safe. My brother and I live

with our aunt, who owns this house. We have no property whatever. What I have been telling you was in the effort to keep you in good humor till the police arrived. But what can it all mean? It is simply incredible."

I picked up the envelope and stared at it stupidly. "The address is the same," I said, trying to find something to stand on.

"I know it; that's what makes it so uncanny. I can not possibly understand. Perhaps the police can untangle it."

The police! I saw that I should have to give a good account of myself when the police arrived. Where did I stand, anyhow? What did it mean?

No man would write such a thing for the fun of it.

"I'm sorry," said I awkwardly. "I thought I was doing right. Indeed, I really thought so."

"And I thank you. You will admit that some of my suspicions were excusable. To whom am I indebted?"—graciously. In this mood she was charming.

I told her my name.

She looked puzzled, and finally shook her head.

"It has a familiar sound, but I can not place it."

"There goes the bell," I exclaimed. "It's the police,—come for the lunatic!"

The girl flew to the door. I could easily read her mind. If I *was* a burglar or a lunatic, the police meant protection; in case my errand was in good faith, there would still be the police to greet the mysterious stranger.

Presently she returned, followed by a private detective and two policemen.

"Is this the fellow?" asked the former, scowling at me.

The girl explained, rather incoherently, her mistake. Everybody sat down. It was quite a social gathering, or would have been but for the scrutiny of the police, which I bore none too well. From all sides questions came popping at me, and it was only by the use of the telephone connecting my

bachelor quarters that I succeeded in establishing my identity. The frayed envelope was vastly interesting to the police. They read it forward and backward, upside down, and even held it close to the fire to see if any sympathetic ink had been used in writing it.

"I guess Mr. Carewe's a well-meanin' chap, miss," volunteered the detective. "But this matter will need close attention. It looks like a tough proposition." He began to ply her with questions, but to no avail.

During the examination I vaguely wondered what the other fellow was doing with *my* coat.

The clock on the mantel struck half after midnight.

"There's only one thing to be done," said the detective; "and that's to turn out the lights and wait for the blood-thirsty gent."

For three-quarters of an hour we five sat in the semi-darkness, our ears strained to catch the faintest foreign sound. Once I sneezed suddenly, and one of the policemen nearly fell out of his chair. It may seem funny to you who read, but it was mighty serious to the girl and myself. The suspense was nerve-racking. We scarcely dared breathe naturally. The occasional slumping of the coal in the grate was pregnant with terrors. And our faces, seen but dimly, were drawn and tense with the silent watching. Every eye

was directed toward the baleful window, through which, at any moment, we expected to see a man crawl.

"Sh!" The detective raised a warning hand.

On the stillness of the night there came a clicking sound, like that of a key being inserted in a lock. Presently we heard the hall door open and close. We waited in agony, or at least I did. Possibly a minute passed, and then we saw the figure of a man loom in the doorway. We saw his arm extend toward the electric-light button, and instantly the room became brilliant with light.

The young man blinked at us and we blinked at him.

"If you move a step," said the detective threateningly, "I'll plug you full o' lead."

"What the d—?" began the newcomer, gazing from face to face.

"Stop!" cried the girl, springing to his side; "it is my brother!"

Her brother! I looked at the man with indescribable horror. He had on *my coat!* And, more than this, he was a man on whose honor I would formerly have staked my life—Arthur Kellerd, one of my classmates at college. And this exquisite girl was his sister, the girl I had always been wanting to meet!

"Your brother!" cried the detective, taken aback.

"Yes, her brother," said Kellerd amiably. "Now, what's all this pother about, anyhow?" Here he chanced to get a good square look at me. "Hang me, if it isn't Dicky Carewe!—and wearing *my* coat!" He came forward and grasped my limp hand and pumped it. "If you only knew how I've been cursing you!" he added, laughing.

Then everybody began to talk at once, and nobody would have learned anything had not the detective resolutely interfered. He thrust the frayed envelope under Kellerd's nose.

"Do you know anything about this?" he demanded.

Kellerd scrutinized it for a moment,

and then began to laugh; I might say that he roared.

"I'm askin' you if you know anything about it?" repeated the detective coldly.

"I ought to know all about it," answered Kellerd finally; "I wrote it not four days ago."

"Arthur!" cried the girl, her voice full of shame, horror, anguish and reproach.

"Come, come, Nancy; it's all a curious mistake, a very curious mistake; and you'll all readily understand why I laughed, when I explain."

"A joke, eh?" said the detective. "Perhaps you can explain it, and perhaps you can't,"—truculently.

"Easily. You have doubtless heard of Norman Douglas," he began.

The police shook their heads, but the girl and I looked interested.

"Douglas is the fellow who's writing all those queer detective yarns for the magazines," said I.

"Well," said Kellerd, "I've been trying to keep it dark, but here's where I must confess. I'm Douglas, and that slip of paper represents the climax to a chapter in a new story. Come into the library, gentlemen."

We followed soberly, even foolishly. Kellerd drew out from a drawer in his desk a bundle of manuscript, and the paragraph he read aloud coincided with the writing on the envelope.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" breathed the detective heavily.

I looked around for a hole to crawl into, but there wasn't any.

"Your sister notified us that a lunatic was at large and had forcibly entered the house," said the detective, perfectly willing to cast all the odium on my shoulders. (I could have throttled him with joy in my heart!)

"A lunatic?" roared Kellerd. For a moment I thought he was going to die of suffocation, and if he had I should not have been sorry at that moment. To have made an ass of myself before the prettiest girl I had ever laid eyes on!

"I'm very sorry," said the girl.

"Never you mind," I replied. "Some day I'll tell you all about the tabloids for the breath I found in Arthur's coat."

A short time after, the policemen solemnly filed out into the hall and into the street; and, not being in a strictly amiable frame of mind, I started to follow.

"Oh, hang it, now, Dicky!" cried Kellerd; "a man who used to be a professional joke-writer ought not to harbor any ill feelings. Have a cigar?"

I shook my head. I had an idea that I wanted to utilize.

"But I want you to meet my sister."

"I am delighted,"—bowing rather stiffly.

"But you're not going off with my coat again!"

I flushed, and shook the erstwhile evil garment from my shoulders.

"Not just a friendly cigar?" pleaded Kellerd.

"Nary a one."

The girl approached shyly and touched my arm. (This was my idea.)

"Not even a cup of chocolate,—if I make it?"

"Oh," said I, "that's altogether a different matter."

Subsequent events proved that it was.

# A NIGHT'S ENCHANTMENT

SO much depended on every one's utter lack of nervousness and embarrassment that Shaw, the stage manager, decided my presence at the final rehearsal would only add to the tension, and was therefore unnecessary. The "star" complained that her efforts to interpret my lines to my satisfaction were wearing her thin, while the "leading man" declared that he could not enter naturally into the spirit of the

comedy so long as he knew I was watching from across the front.

To tell the truth, I was not unagreeable. There were many things I wanted to change, and I knew that if I once got headway I should have to write the play all over; and that was not in the contract. My room was better than my company. So Shaw gave me a card to The Players and left me there in the care of a distinguished fellow dramatist.

We had a capital dinner, and our exchange of experiences would have made a book equal in length to *Revelation*. What a time a fellow has to get a manager to listen to a better play than he has yet produced! I'm afraid that

we said many uncomplimentary things about actors in general and managers in particular. The actor always has his own idea, the manager has his, and between them the man who wrote the play is pretty well knocked about. But when the play is produced every one's idea proves of some use, so I find.

In spite of the good dinner and the interesting conversation, I found myself glancing constantly at my watch or at the clock, thinking that at such and such a time to-morrow night my puppets would be uttering such and such a line, perhaps as I wanted them to utter it, perhaps as they wanted to utter it. It did not matter that I had written two successful novels and a popular com-

edy; I was still subject to spells of diffidence and greenness. Much depended upon this second effort; it was, or it was not, to establish me in New York as a playwright of the first order.

I played a game of billiards indifferently well, peered into Booth's room and evoked his kindly spirit to watch over my future, smoked incessantly, and waited impatiently for Shaw's promised telephone call. The call came at ten-thirty, and Shaw said that three acts had gone off superbly and that everything pointed to a big success. My spirits rose wonderfully. I had as yet never experienced the thrill of a curtain call, my first play having been

produced while I was abroad. If they called me before the curtain my cup would be full; there would be nothing left in the world but to make money, all other thrills having come and departed. All at once I determined to run up-town to the theater and steal in to see the last act. So I called for my hat and coat, apologized to my friend, and went forth into the night—and romance!

Gramercy Park is always still at night, quiet even in the very heart of turmoil. Only an indefinable murmur drifted over from the crowded life of Broadway. I was conning some lines I thought fine, epigrams and fragmentary philosophy.

"Hurry! We have only half an hour!"

The voice, soft and musical, broke the silence ere my foot had left the last step. Amazed, I looked in the direction whence came this symphony of vocal allurement. A handsome coupé, with groom and footman, stood at the curb. A woman in evening gown leaned out. I stopped and stared. The footman at the door touched his hat. I gazed over my shoulder to see if any one had come out of the club at the same time that I had. I was alone.

"Hurry! I have waited at least half an hour. We haven't a moment to waste."

Some one in the upper rooms of the

club lifted a shade to open a window, and the light illuminated her features. She was young and very handsome. A French wit once said that the whisper of a beautiful woman can be heard farther than the loudest call of duty. Now, I honestly confess that if she had been homely, or even moderately good-looking, I should have politely explained to her that she had made a peculiar mistake. I was somebody else. As it was, with scarce any hesitation I stepped into the carriage, and the footman closed the door. To this day I can not analyze the impulse that led me into that carriage: Fate in the guise of mischief, Destiny in motley and out for a lark, I know not which, nor care.

"I am sorry to have kept you waiting," said I.

"I thought you would never come," she answered.

Thought I would never come? The coupé started off at a rate likely to bring us under the vigilant eyes of the police. We pared the corner neatly and swung into Broadway, going uptown. The theaters were emptying, and here and there the way was choked with struggling cabs; but our driver knew his business, and we were never delayed more than a moment. Not another word was spoken until we reached Thirty-fourth Street. I was silent because I had nothing to say.

"One after another they came out. I

thought you would never, never come. I had all I could do to keep from going into the club after you!" She tore off her long, white gloves and flung them (savagely, I thought) into her lap.

Going into the club after me? Heavens! What a scandal I had escaped! What the deuce was it all about, anyway? Who was I? What was expected of me? My nerve lost a particle of its strength, but I could not back out now. It was too late. I was in for some sort of excitement. I had always been skeptical about mistaken identity. This was to be my conversion.

"You will never forgive me, I know, for waiting outside a club for you."

She snuggled over to her side of the carriage.

"Yes, I will!" I replied with alacrity. Who wouldn't forgive her? I moved closer.

The blue light of the arc-lamps flashed into the window at frequent intervals. Each time I noted her face as best I could. It was as beautifully cut as a Cellini cameo, and as pale as ivory under friction. You will laugh. "They are always beautiful," you will say. Well, who ever heard of a homely woman going a-venturing? Besides, as I remarked, it wouldn't have been an adventure if she had been homely, for I shouldn't have entered the carriage. To be sure, I was proving myself a cad

for not enlightening her as to her error in the matter of identification; but I was human and young, and rather fond of my Stevenson, and this had all the charm and quality of the New Arabian Nights.

"It is all so terrible!" Her voice was tense; there was a note of agony in it that was real. She was balling her handkerchief, and I could see that her fingers were long and white and without jewels, though I caught the intermittent glimmer of a fine necklace circling an adorable throat. What a fine chance for a rascal!

I wondered if she would have me arrested when she found out? Was I married, single, a brother, a near

friend? What the deuce was her trouble? Ought I to kiss her? My double was a fortunate duffer. How I envied him!

"Women are so silly sometimes. I do not know why I was dragged into this," she said.

Dragged into what? Had a crime been committed, or had some one run away with another man's wife? Heavens! we might be eloping and I not know anything about it! I shivered, not with fear, but with a strange elation.

"How could I have done it? How could I? Terrible!"

"It must be," I admitted readily. No, a woman does not elope in her ball-

gown. Perhaps we were going after the trunks.

"To think that he would force me into a thing like this!"—vehemently.

"I see that there is nothing left for me to do but to punch his head." I thought I was getting on famously.

She gave me a swift, curious glance.

"Oh, I am brave enough," said I. I wondered if she had noticed that I was a passably good-looking man, as men go.

"What is done is done,"—wearily. "Retrospection will do us no good."

"What do you wish me to do?" I asked presently.

It was like writing a composite novel, no one knowing what the other

chapters were about. I had already forgotten that I had written a play which was to be produced the following night; I forgot everything but the potent charm of the mystery which sat beside me and which I was determined to unravel, as they say in detective stories.

"What do you wish me to do?" I repeated.

"I will tell you when the time comes. For your own sake, be advised by me and do nothing rash. You are so impulsive."

For my own sake do nothing rash: I was so impulsive! My hand wandered toward the door-latch, and fell. No! I would stick it out, whatever happened.

"You are not afraid, are you?" she asked.

"Afraid of what?"—adroitly.

"I was right in waiting for you,"—simply.

Maybe; that remained to be seen.

We crossed under the Sixth Avenue "L," and the roar of a passing train silenced us for a time. Who was I, anyway? Where were we going? Why didn't she call me by some first name? So far she hadn't given me a clue to anything. An idea came to me.

"Are you wise in taking me there to-night?" I asked. This was very cunning of me.

She coughed slightly and peered from the window. "Ten blocks more!

Oh, if only we dared go faster, faster, and have it all over with!"

"A policeman would delay us no inconsiderable time," I cautioned. "And think of its being reported in the papers! That wouldn't help matters. They are bad enough as they are." Doubtless they were!

She said nothing.

"Courage, courage!" I said; "all will end well." At least I sincerely hoped it would end well. I reached over and touched her hand. She withdrew that member of an exquisite anatomy as suddenly as if my touch had stung her. Once more I found myself in a maze. Evidently, whoever I was, I did not stand on such terms with her as to be

allowed the happiness of holding her hand. And I had almost kissed her!

Then a horrible thought scorched me. I had more than a thousand dollars in my wallet. I snuggled over to my side of the carriage. The newspapers were teeming with stories of new bunko-games, and this might be one of the classics of getting-rich-quick on other people's money. I slyly buttoned up my coat. Anyhow, it was chilly.

On, on we rolled; light after light flashed into the window, gloom followed gloom.

More than a thousand dollars was a large sum for an author to be carrying about; and if the exploit turned out to be a police affair I might be seriously

questioned as to how an author came by so large a sum. Yet, as I thought of her necklace, I felt my cheeks grow red with shame. It's so hard to doubt a beautiful young woman! Still, the jewels might not be real. There were many false gems in New York, animate and inanimate. If her jewels were genuine, two years' royalties would not have purchased the pear-shaped pearl pendant that gleamed at her throat. If she was really an adventuress she was of a new type, and worth studying from the dramatist's point of view. Had she really mistaken me? Quite accidentally I touched her cloak. It was of Persian lamb. Hang it, adventuresses don't go around in Persian lamb: not

in New York. Ha! I had it. I would find out what she was.

I leaned over quickly and kissed her cheek. There was not a sound, only I felt her shudder. She wiped with her handkerchief the spot my lips had touched. I was a cad and a wretch. When she did speak her tones were even and low.

"I did not quite believe that of you."

"I could not help it!" I declared, ready to confess that I was an impostor; and as I look back I know that I told the truth when I said I could not help it. I didn't care where the carriage went, nor what the end would be.

"And I trusted you!" The reproach was genuine.

I had nothing to say. My edifice of suspicions had suddenly tumbled about my ears.

"I am sorry; I have acted like a cad. I am one," I said finally.

"I was helpless. One after another the men we trust fail us," she answered despondently.

"Madam, I am a wretch. I am not the gentleman you have taken me for. I have had the misfortune to resemble another gentleman."

"I never saw you before in all my life, nor any person that resembles you."

I gasped. This was what the old dramatists called a thunderbolt from heaven. I felt for my wallet; it was

still in my pocket. Inconsistently, I grew angry.

"Then, what the devil—!"

"Do not add profanity to ill manners," she interposed. "Perhaps I have no right to complain. There is the door, sir; you have but to press the button, stop the driver, and get out. I am in a terribly embarrassing position tonight, one which my own folly has brought me to. It was absolutely necessary that a gentleman should accompany me in this carriage to my destination. When you came forth from your club—the only club the exact location of which I am familiar with—you appeared to be a gentleman, one I could trust to accompany me. To attract your

attention, and at the same time arouse your curiosity, I had to resort to equivocal methods. It is an adventure, sir. Will you see it to the end, or shall I press the button?" She seemed really in earnest.

"Permit me to ask a question or two!" I was mightily confused at the turn of things.

"Perfect confidence in me, or I shall open the door."

"In any other city but New York—"

"Yes or no!"—imperiously.

"Hang it, madam!"

Her hand went toward the electric button.

"To the end of the world, and no questions asked."

Her hand dropped. "Thank you,"—gently.

"Curiosity is something we can't help; otherwise I should not be here, ass that I am! Chivalry isn't all dead. If you are in trouble depend upon me; only I must be back in New York by to-morrow night."

"You will not leave the city. You have no fear?"

"I should not be here else."

"Oh, but you must be imagining all sorts of terrible things."

"I am doing some thinking, I'll admit. How easily a woman can make a fool of a man!"

"Sometimes."

"I am a shining example. How you

must have laughed at me! A pretty woman has more power over a man's destiny than all the signs of the Zodiac put together. And it's perfectly natural that he should want to kiss her. Isn't it?"

"I am not a man."

"A saint would have tripped. Put yourself in my place—"

"Thank you; I am perfectly satisfied."

"A beautiful woman asks me to enter her carriage—"

"And, thinking that I had mistaken you for some one I knew, you kissed me!"—derisively.

"I wished to learn where I stood in your affections."

"A very interesting method of procedure!"

"And when I touched your hand you acted as if mine had stung you."

"It did."

"There's no getting around that,"—resignedly. "Shall I tell you frankly what, for an instant or two, I took you to be?"

"If it will relieve your mind."

"Well, I believed you to be some classic adventuress."

"And you are sure I am not?"

"Positive now. You see, I have considerable money on my person."

"Wouldn't it be wise for you to hand it over to some policeman to keep for you till to-morrow? Do not take any

unnecessary risks. You do not dream into what I am leading you."

The carriage suddenly stopped.

"The journey is at an end," she said.

"So soon?"

A moment later the door opened, and I stepped out to assist her to alight. She waved me aside. We stood in front of some millionaire's palace. It was golden with illumination. Was it a wedding and was I to be a witness? Or was some one making his will? Perhaps it was only a ball or a reception. I stopped my cogitations. What was the use asking myself questions? I should soon know all.

"Follow me," she said, as she lightly mounted the steps.

I followed. . . . Here, in New York, the most unromantic city in all the wide world! I was suddenly seized with nervousness and a partial failure of the cardiac organs to perform their usual functions.

She turned to me. "There is yet time."

"Time for what?"

"Time to run."

"There was a moment. . . . Lead on,"—quietly. I thought of the young man with the cream tarts.

She touched a bell, and the door was quickly opened, admitting us into the hall. A servant took our belongings.

"Dinner is served, miss," said the

servant, eying me curiously, even suspiciously.

It appeared that I was to dine! What the deuce did it all mean? A dinner at supper-time! A very distressing thought flashed through my mind. Suppose she had known me all along, and had lured me here to witness some amateur performance. I shuddered. I flattered myself. There was no amateur performance, as presently you will see. I followed her into the dining-room. Fortunately, I was in evening dress. I should at least be presentable, and as cool as any man in the room. Comedy or tragedy, or whatever it was going to be, I determined to show that I had good blood in my veins, even though

I had, to all appearances, been played for a fool.

Around a table covered with exquisite linen, silver and glass sat a party of elegantly dressed men and women. At the sight of us the guests rose confusedly and made toward us with shouts of laughter, inquiry and admiration. They gathered round my companion and plied her with a hundred questions, occasionally stealing a glance at me. I saw at once that I stood among a party of ultra-smart people. Somehow I felt that I represented a part in their mad pastimes.

"Where did you find him?" cried one.

"Was it difficult?" asked another.

"I'll wager he didn't need much urging!" roared a gentleman with a rubicund nose.

"He is positively good-looking!" said one woman, eying me boldly.

I bowed ironically, and she looked at her neighbor as if to say: "Why, the animal understands what I say!"

"My friends," said the girl, waving her hand toward me, "I have paid my detestable forfeit." Her tones did not bespeak any particular enjoyment.

A wager! I stood alone, my face burning with chagrin. I could feel my ears growing, like the very ass that I was. A wager!

"To table!" cried the gentleman with the rubicund nose. Evidently he was

host. "We must have the story in full. It certainly must be worth telling. The girl has brought home a gentleman, I'm hanged!"

The guests resumed their chairs noisily.

The girl faced me, and for a space it was a battle of the eyes.

"Will you do me the honor?" she said half-mockingly, nodding toward the only vacant chairs at the table.

"Would it not be wise for me to go at once?" I asked quietly.

"If you do not sit at the table with me, I lose. But please yourself,"—wearily. "It has all been very distasteful to me."

"I shall stay to the bitter end. My

conceit and assurance need a drubbing." I offered her my arm. All eyes were centered on us. She hesitated. "We might as well go through this ordeal in a proper spirit and manner," I said. I rather believe I puzzled her.

She flushed slightly, but laid her hand on my arm, and together we walked over to the vacant chairs and sat down. The laughter and hum of voices ceased instantly.

In faith, I was becoming amused. They were going to have their fun with me; well, two could play at that game.

## II

The host rose, and, leaning on his finger-tips, he addressed me: "Sir, all this doubtless strikes you as rather extraordinary."

"Very extraordinary," I replied.

"To dine under such circumstances is not accorded to every man."

"To which do you refer: the honor or the *modus operandi?*"

"Both. Now, an explanation is due you."

"So I observe,"—gravely.

"The pleasure is mine. To begin with, permit me to introduce you to my guests." One by one he named them, the ladies and gentlemen. I had heard

of them all. Money had made them famous. "As for myself, I am Daniel Ainsworth; this is my home. I dare say you have heard of me."

"I have won money on your horses, sir,"—with all the gravity of expression I found possible to assume.

My remark was greeted with laughter.

My host, composing his lips, resumed. "And now, sir, whom have I the honor to address?"

"I am the author of many a famous poem,"—tranquilly.

"Ah!"

"Yes; anonymous. Sir, my name would mean nothing to you or your guests: I am poor."

There was a trace of admiration in the girl's eyes as she turned her head. "Besides," I went on, "I want a little revenge."

"Good!" bawled my host; "good! You're a man of kidney, sir. A gentleman is always a gentleman; and I do not need to look at you twice, sir, to note that my niece's choice has been a happy one."

"You have not introduced me to your niece," said I, "who is, next to myself, the most important guest at the table."

"Hang me! The young lady at your side is Miss Helen Berkeley, the best horsewoman in the state, if I do say so myself."

Great applause, as they say in the press gallery. I looked squarely at the girl, but she was idly busy turning her empty wine-glass slowly round and round.

"I appreciate the honor, sir," I said; "but now will you favor me with the *modus operandi,* or, to be particular, the reason of all this mystery?"

"I approach that at once. This is leap year, as you will recollect. On January first I gave a leap-year party, and in the spirit of fun each lady present declared her intention of bringing to a series of late dinners a gentleman whom none of us knew, either by sight or by reputation. He was to be lured into a carriage by some story or other,

and was not to know the true state of things till he sat at the table. My niece was the last on the list. Those who backed down were to give a house-party of a week's length. Women detest house-parties, and that is the one reason why this comedy has gone down the line without a failure. This is the eighth dinner. Each lady present has fulfilled her obligation to the year. We have had some curious specimens of humanity: a barber, a mild lunatic, a detective who thought he was on the trail of some terrible crime, an actor, a political reformer, and an English groom who palmed himself off as a lord. The actor and yourself, sir, are the only men who seemed to possess any

knowledge of the various uses of dinner forks."

"You haven't seen me eat yet," I interpolated. All this was highly amusing to me. I was less a victim than a spectator.

"You will do us the honor of permitting us to criticize your knowledge of the forks," laughed Ainsworth. "Now, Nell, tell us how you lured Mr. Anonymous into your carriage."

Very quietly she recounted the tale. She omitted but one incident.

"In front of a club!" cried the ladies in unison. "Why in the world didn't we think of that?"

"Miss Berkeley has omitted one thing," said I maliciously.

"And, pray, what?" asked Miss Berkeley's uncle.

"Remember," she whispered, "you are supposed to be a gentleman."

I took umbrage at the word "supposed."

"Miss Berkeley must tell you what she has omitted in the course of her narrative."

"And I refuse to tell."

"Hang it, Nell, I'll wager Mr. Anonymous kissed you!" cried her uncle.

"Caught!" cried one of the ladies.

"Allow me a word," I interposed. I was already sorry. "There was a method in my action which must not be misconstrued. I believed, for a mo-

ment, that Miss Berkeley might be a new species of bunko-steerer. If she objected noisily to my salute I should find my case proved; if she cried, I was wrong."

"And?"

"She did neither. She rubbed her cheek."

"I'll warrant!" my host bawled noisily. "Oh, this is rich! A bunko-steerer!"

"Miss Berkeley," I whispered, "we are quits."

"Not yet,"—ominously.

It was almost time for me to go!

"I was going to ask your pardon," said the uncle in his hunter-voice; "but I think you have been paid for your

trouble. Is there anything you would like?"

"Three things, sir."

"And these?" he asked, while every one looked curiously at me. I was still an unknown quantity.

"My hat, my coat, and the way to the door, for I presume you have no further use for me."

My reply appealed to the guests as monstrous funny. It was some time ere the laughter subsided. My host seemed to be threatened with an attack of apoplexy.

"My dear sir," said he, "I beg of you to remain, not as a source for our merriment, but as the chief guest of honor. I believe you have won that place."

I turned to Miss Berkeley. "Do you bid me remain?"

Silence.

I placed my hand on the back of my chair, preparatory to sliding it from under me. She stayed me.

"Do not go,"—softly. "I haven't had my revenge."

I sat down. I was curious to learn what color this revenge was going to take. "Mr. Ainsworth, my compliments!"—raising my glass, being very careful not to touch the contents.

"Bully!" cried my host, thumping the table with his fist. "James, a dozen bottles of '96. There's a gentleman,"—nodding to those nearest him; "you can tell 'em a mile off. A little shy of

strangers," humorously falling into horse-talk, "but he's money coming down the home-stretch."

Then everybody began to talk at once, and I knew that the dinner proper was on the way.

"Aren't you just a little above such escapades as this?" I asked of the girl.

"Do not make me any more uncomfortable than I am," she begged. "But having gone into it I had too much courage to back down."

"The true courage would have been to give the house-party."

"But men always insist upon your marrying them at house-parties."

"I see I have much to learn,"—meekly. "And the men are right."

"What an escape I have had!"

"Meaning house-parties, or that I am a gentleman?"

"If you had not been a gentleman! For, of course, you are, since my uncle has so dubbed you. If you had not been a gentleman!"

"If you had not been a lady! If you had been a bunko-steerer! And I still do not know that you are not one. Do you believe me? I kept my hand on my wallet pocket nearly all the time."

"I understood you to say that you were poor."

"Oh, I mean that I am too poor to hunt for excitement in bizarre things."

"Confess that you look upon me with a frank contempt!"—imperiously.

WILL·GREFE
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"Never!"

"That in your secret mind you write me down a silly fool."

"Allow me to quote Dogberry—'Masters, remember that I am an ass; though it be not written down, yet forget not that I am an ass!' Thus, I may not call you a fool. Besides, it would be very impolite."

"You neither eat nor drink. Why?"

"I demand to retain some of my self-respect."

She leaned on her elbows, her chin in her palms. She had wonderful eyes, and for as long a time as a minute these eyes impaled me on barbs of light. "You must think us a pack of fools."

"Oh, indeed, no; only rich."

"That is almost an epigram,"—warningly. "You will lead me to believe that you belong to smart society in some provincial town."

"Heaven forfend!"—earnestly.

"But speak all the thought. Nothing prevents truth from either of us tonight."

"All of what thought?"

"We are not fools, only rich."

"Well, I lower the bucket, then; and if I can bring truth to the top of the well you will promise not to blush on beholding her?"

"I promise."

"It is maddening and unhealthy to be rich and idle. The rich and idle do such impossible things in the wild ef-

fort to pass away the dragging hours. Society is not made up of fools: rather knaves and madmen. Money and idleness result in a mild attack of insanity."

"Thanks."

"You are welcome. Shall I lower truth along with the butter of flattery?"

"You may lower the butter of flattery. So that is how the great public looks upon us?"

"Yes, in a way; while it envies you."

"I have always been rich. What is poverty like?"

"It is comparative."

"It must be horrid."

"Poverty is ugly only when man himself is the cause of it."

"Another epigram. I have always

been under my uncle's care,"—with the slightest droop of the lips.

"Ah! His knowledge begins at the table and ends at the stable: vintages and horses. If a woman had crossed his path he would have been a great man."

"Poor Uncle Dan! To him I am his favorite filly, and he has put huge sums on me to win the ducal race. Everybody says that I'm to marry the Duke of Roxclift."

"And you?" I do not know why my heart sank a little as I hesitatingly put this question.

"I? Oh, I'm going to balk at the quarter and throw the race. To-night, what would you have done in my place?"

"Hailed a gentleman exactly like myself."

She dallied with a rose, brushing it across her lips. "I do not know why I desire your good opinion. Perhaps it's the novelty of sitting beside a man who does not believe in flattery."

"Flattery is a truth that is not true. I think you are charming, beautiful, engaging, enchanting, mystifying. I can think of no other adjectives."

"If flattery is a truth that is not true, then all your pretty adjectives mean nothing."

"Oh, but I do not flatter you. Men flatter homely women—homely women who are rich and easily hoodwinked. What I have offered you in the line of

decorative adjectives your mirror has already told you time and time again. Had I said that you are witty, scholarly, scientific, vastly and highly intellectual, not knowing you any better than I do, that would have been flattery. Do you grasp the point?"

"Nebulously. You are trying to say something nice."

"We are getting on capitally. When I left the club to-night the wildest stretch of my fancy would not have placed me here beside you."

"Yes,"—irrelevantly, "most of us are mad. Everything is so terribly monotonous."

"To-night?"

"Well, not to-night."

"You have not yet asked me who I am."

"Then you are somebody?"—drolly. She contemplated me, speculatively as it were.

I laughed. This was the most amusing and enchanting adventure I had ever had the luck to fall into. "The world thinks so," I replied to her question.

"The world? What world?"

"My world . . . and a part of yours."

"Are you one of those men who accomplish something besides novel dinners?"

"So I am led to believe."

"In what way?"

"Ah, but that is a secret."

She shrugged. Evidently she was incredulous. "Are you an actor?" suddenly recollecting where she had picked me up.

"Only in 'All the world's a stage.'"

"I will ask you: Will you do me the honor of telling me who you are?"

"My self-respect denies me that pleasure."

"Fiddlesticks!" This was very human.

"Is it possible that I am interesting you?"—surprised.

"You are a clever man, whoever and whatever you are. Where did you learn to read a woman so readily? Who told you that when you confront

a woman with a mystery you trap her interest along with her curiosity? Yes, you are clever. If you told me your name and your occupation I dare say I should straightway become bored."

"Truth still shivers on the well's edge."

She nibbled the rose-leaves.

"Does your interest in episodes like to-night always die so suddenly?"—nodding toward the others, who had long since ceased to pay me any particular attention.

"Nearly always."

"Very well; since they have forgotten us let us forget them." I leaned toward her, my voice was not so steady as it should have been. "In what man-

ner would it benefit me to tell you my name and what my occupation in the great world is? Would it put me on the list of your acquaintances?"

She eyed me thoughtfully. "That depends."

"Upon what?"

"Whether you were worth knowing. I addressed other gentlemen in front of your club. They politely said I had made a mistake."

"They were old or married."

"That wasn't it."

"Then they didn't see you in the light, as I did."

"What difference would that have made?"

"All the difference in the world.

But you have tabooed flattery. I see that I should have been a barber, a mild lunatic, or a detective."

"You would have been easier to dispose of."

I directed my gaze toward the door, and she surrendered a smile.

"You might be worth knowing,"—musingly.

"I promise to be."

"I shall give it thought. I should never forgive myself if I were the indirect cause of your joining this carnival of fools."

"I see that I shall last much longer in your thoughts as the Unknown,"—reflectively.

"Eat," she commanded.

"I am not hungry; I have dined."

"Drink, then."

"I am not thirsty."

She took my glass and poured the contents into hers, then handed it to me. "Now!" she said.

"Why?"

"You make me think of Monte Cristo: what terrible revenge are you going to take?"

"It will be upon myself: that of never forgetting you."

"One single sip!"

I accepted the glass and took one sip. "Now I have lost what I desired to retain—my respect. So long as I touched nothing at this table I held the advantage. My name is—"

She put her hands over her ears. "Don't!"

"Very well: the woman tempted me."

"Haven't you a better epigram?"

"Perhaps I am saving them."

"For what?"

"Who knows that I am not writing a play?"

"I live here; a card will find me on Thursdays after four."

"I shall come Wednesdays, thereby saving you the trouble."

"That is not wit; it is rudeness. Do not come either Thursdays or Wednesdays."

"How shall you know who it is?"

"Trust a woman."

"Ah, here comes the butler with the liqueurs. I am glad. Presently I should be making love to you; now I am about to be free."

"Are you quite sure?"—with a penetrating glance. I believe she knew the power of her beauty.

"Well, I shall be free to go home where I belong,"—compromising.

And I rose. Perhaps the drollest episode of the dinner took place as I started for the door.

"Ever heard of Starlight?" cried Uncle Daniel down the room. "No? Well, she's down on the winter books at fifty to one. Stack your money on her now; it's a hunch."

"Thank you."

"Good night," said I to the girl, bowing.

"Good night," smiling.

I wonder if she knew that I had stolen the rose? On the way home my mind returned to my play. Had the fourth act gone off as smoothly as the others?

What a girl for a man!

The curtain fell on the first act, and the thrilling sound of beating hands came to me dimly.

"They are calling for you," said Shaw excitedly.

"What am I to do?"—nervously.

"What? Haven't you thought out something to say?"—disgustedly.

"Nary a word!"

"Well, just lead out Miss Blank and bow. You're not an old hand; they will let you off without a speech."

So I led the young woman who had helped to make me famous to the footlights, and bowed. I do not know what caused me to glance toward the left upper proscenium, but I did . . . and felt my heart stop and then throb violently. It was Miss Berkeley. Heaven only knows how long I should have stared at her but for the warning pressure of the actress' hand over mine. We disappeared behind the curtain. I was confused by many emotions.

While the hands were shifting about the next "set" a boy handed me the

crumpled margin of a program. I unfolded it and read: "Will 'Mr. Anonymous' do Miss Berkeley the honor of visiting her box?"

"Mr. Anonymous" presented himself forthwith. Miss Berkeley was with an elderly woman, who proved to be her grandaunt. I was introduced.

"Aunty, this is the gentleman I told you about. Isn't it terrible?"

"Terrible? I should call it wholly enchanting. Sir, you will pardon the child for her wildness. My nephew doesn't know as much as his celebrated horses. Now, go ahead and talk while I look over the audience."

If only all elderly ladies were as thoughtful!

"And I have read your books; I have witnessed your play!" Miss Berkeley said.

"Thursday, after four?"

"No. Everybody calls then. Come Wednesday."

"I have a confession to make," said I. "You dropped a rose on the floor last night. I stole it. Must I return it to you?"

"I never do anything without a purpose," was all she said.

So I kept the rose.

# NO CINDERELLA

"MADAM, have you lost a slipper?" I asked politely. I held toward her a dainty shoe that might very well have appareled the foot of Venus; only one can not quite lift the imagination to the point of picturing Venus rising out of the Cyprian wave in a pair of ball-room slippers.

"I am not yet addressed as madam," said she, calmly drawing her skirts about her feet, which were already securely hidden.

"Not yet? Ah, that is very fortunate, indeed. I see I am not too late."

"Sir!"

But I saw no anger on her face. There was, however, a mixture of amusement, *hauteur* (that darling word of the lady novelists!) and objection. She hadn't the least idea who I was, and I was not going to tell her for some time to come. I was a prodigal, with a few new ideas.

"I meant nothing more serious than that you might happen to be Cinderella," said I. "What in the world should I do with Cinderella's slipper, once she was safely married to the prince?"

She swayed her fan indolently, but

made no effort to rise. I looked on this as rather encouraging.

"It would be somewhat embarrassing to ask a married woman if she were Cinderella," I proceeded.

"I should not particularize," she observed; "married or single, it would be embarrassing."

She was charming; a Watteau shepherdess in a fashionable ball-gown. We were all alone in the nook at the farther end of the conservatory; and I was glad. Her eyes were brown, with a glint of gold around the pupils, a kaleidoscopic iris, as it were. She possessed one of those adorable chins that defy the future to double them; smooth and round, such as a man delights to

curve his palm under; and I might search the several languages I know to describe fitly her red mouth. Her hair was the color of a fallen maple-leaf, a rich, soft, warm October brown, streaked with red. Patience! You may laugh, but, for my part, give me a dash of red above the alabaster brow of a pretty woman. It is a mute language which speaks of a sparkling intellect; and whenever I seek the exhilaration that rises from a witty conflict, I find me a woman with a glimmer of red in her hair.

"Well, sir?" said she, breaking in on my train of specific adjectives.

"Pardon me! I was thinking how I should describe you were I a success-

ful novelist, which I declare with no little regret, I am not."

"You certainly have all the assurance of a writer of books, to speak to me in this manner."

"My assurance is based wholly on the possession of a truant slipper. I am bold; but the end justifies the means," —having in mind her foot.

Her shoulders drew together and fell.

"I am searching for the Cinderella who has lost a slipper; and I am going to call you Cinderella till I have proof that you are not she whom I seek."

"It is very kind of you," she replied, with a hint of sunshine struggling at

the corners of her lips. "Have I ever met you before?"—puzzling her arched brows.

"Memory does not follow reincarnation," I answered owlishly; "but I dare say that I often met you at the Temple of Venus in the old, old days."

She appeared slightly interested.

"What, may I ask, was your business in the old, old days?"

"I played the cithern."

"And I?"

"I believe you distributed flowers."

"Do you know the hostess?"—with solemn eyes.

"Oh, yes; though she hasn't the slightest recollection of me. But that's perfectly natural. At affairs like this

the hostess recalls familiarly to her mind only those who sat at her dinner-table earlier in the evening. All other invitations are simply paid obligations."

"You possess some discernment, at least."

"Thank you."

"But I wish I knew precisely what you are about,"—her eyes growing critical in their examination.

"I am seeking Cinderella," once more holding out the slipper. Then I looked at my watch. "It is not yet twelve o'clock."

"You are, of course, a guest here,"—ruminating, "else you could not have passed the footman at the door."

"Mark my attire; or, candidly, do I look like a footman?"

"No-o; I can't say that you do; but in Cinderella, don't you know, the footman carried the slipper."

"Oh, I'm the prince," I explained easily; "I dismissed the footman at the door."

"Cinderella," she mused. She nestled her feet, and looked thoughtfully at her delicate hands. I could see she was at that instant recalling the picture of Cinderella and the ash-heap.

"What was the prince's name?"

"In this case it is just a prince of good fellows."

"I should like some witnesses." She gazed at me curiously, but there was no

distrust in her limpid eye, as clear and moteless as Widow Wadman's.

"Isn't it fine," I cried with a burst of confidence, "to possess the courage to speak to strangers?"

"It is equally courageous to listen," was the retort.

"I knew I should like you!"—with enthusiasm.

She stirred uneasily. It might have been that her foot had suddenly grown chilled. A storm was whirling outside, and the pale, shadowy flakes of snow brushed the windows.

I approached her, held up the slipper and contemplated it with wrinkled brow. She watched me covertly. What a slipper! So small and dainty was it,

so light and airy, that had I suddenly withdrawn my hand I verily believe it would have floated. It was part satin and part skin, and the light, striking the inner side of it, permeated it with a faint, rosy glow.

"What a darling thing it is!"—unable to repress my honest admiration. "Light as one of those snowflakes out yonder in the night. What a proud arch the instep has! Ah, but it is a high-bred shoe, fit to tread on the heart of any man. Lovely atom!"

She stirred again. I went on:

"It might really belong to a princess, but only in a fairy-book; for all the princesses I have ever seen couldn't put a hand in a shoe like this, much less a

foot. And when I declare to you, on my honor, that I have met various princesses in my time, you will appreciate the compliment I pay to Cinderella."

The smile on her lips wavered and trembled, like a puff of wind on placid water, and was gone.

"Leave it," she said, melting, "and be gone."

"I couldn't. It wouldn't be gallant at all, don't you know. The prince himself put the slipper on Cinderella."

"But this is a modern instance, and a prosaic world. Men are no longer gallants, but business men or club gossips; and you do not look like a business man."

"I never belonged to a club in my life."

"You do not look quite so unpopular as all that."

A witty woman! To be pretty and witty at the same time—the gifts of Minerva and Venus in lavishment!

"Besides, it is all very improper," she added.

"The shoe?" I cried.

"No; the shoe is proper enough,"—musingly.

"You admit it, then!"—joyfully.

"I refer to the dialogue between two persons who have not been introduced."

"Convention! Formality! Detestable things, always setting Romance at

arm's length, and making Truth desire to wear fashionable clothes."

"Nevertheless, this is improper," she repeated.

"Why, it doesn't matter at all," I said negligently. "We both have been invited to this house to dance; that is to say, our hostess would not invite any objectionable persons. What you mean to say is, unconventional. And I hate convention and formality."

"Are you a poet, then?"—with good-natured derision.

"Oh, no; I have an earning capacity and a pleasant income."

She really laughed this time; and I vaguely recalled pearls and coral and murmuring brooks.

"Won't you please do that again?" I asked eagerly.

But there must have been something in my gaze that frightened Mirth away, for she frowned.

Faintly came the music from the ball-room. They were playing the waltzes from *The Queen's Lace Handkerchief*. The agony of an extemporization seized me.

"Strauss!" I cried, flourishing the slipper. "The blue Danube, the moonshine on the water, the tittle-tattle of the leaves, a man and woman all, all alone! Romance, love, off to the wars! . . ."

"It is a far cry to Cinderella," she interrupted.

"Ah, yes. Music moves me so easily."

"Indeed! It is scarcely noticeable," —slyly.

"Are you Cinderella, then?"

"I do not say so."

"Will you dance with me to prove it one way or the other?"

"Certainly not,"—rather indignantly.

"Why not?"

"There are any number of reasons," she replied.

"Name just one."

"I do not know you."

"You ought to,"—with a double meaning which went for absolutely nothing.

"My angle of vision obscures that idea."

"If you will stand up . . ." I hesitatingly suggested.

"I am perfectly comfortable where I am,"—with an oblique glance at the doorway.

"I am convinced that you are the Cinderella; I can not figure it out otherwise."

"Do not figure at all; simply leave the shoe."

"It is too near twelve o'clock for that. Besides, I wish to demolish the pumpkin theory. It's all tommy-rot about changing pumpkins into chariots, unless you happen to be a successful pie-merchant."

She bit her lips and tapped her cheek with the fan. (Did I mention the bloomy cheeks?)

"Perhaps I am only one of Cinderella's elder sisters."

"That would be very unfortunate. You will recollect that the elder sisters cut off their—"

"Good gracious!"

"Cut off their toes in the mad effort to capture the prince," I continued.

"But I am not trying to capture any prince, not even a fairy prince; and I wouldn't—"

"Cut off your toes?" I suggested questioningly.

"Prolong this questionable conversation, only—"

"You can not stop it till you have the shoe," I said.

"Only," she went on determinedly, "I am so comfortable here that I do not care to return to the ball-room just at present."

"I never expected such a full compliment;" and I made her my most engaging bow.

"I am afraid you will have to cut off *your* toes to get into *that* shoe,"—maliciously.

"I could expect no less than that from you. You keep coming closer to my ideal every moment."

She shrugged disdainfully and assumed a bored expression that did not deceive me in the least.

"Since you are so determined to continue this dialogue, go and fetch some one you know. An introduction is absolutely necessary." She seemed immovable on this point.

"And the moment I turned my back —presto! away would go Cinderella, and I should be in the dark as much as ever regarding the pumpkins. No, I thank you. Be good, and confess that you are Cinderella."

"Sir, this really ceases to be amusing." Her fan closed with a snap.

"It was serious the moment I entered and saw you," I replied frankly.

"I ought to be annoyed excessively. You are a total stranger; I declare that I never saw you before in all my life.

It is true that we are guests in the same house, but that does not give privilege to this particular annoyance. Here I am, talking to you as if it were distinctly proper."

"I can not say that you have put your foot in it yet,"—having recourse to the slipper again. I was having a fine time.

She smiled in spite of the anger which sparkled in her eyes. Of course, if she became downright angry I should tell who I was, only it would spoil everything.

"And you do not know me?" I said dejectedly. "Do you mean to tell me that you have never dreamed of any Prince Charming?"

"I can not say I have,"—icily.

A flock of young persons came in noisily, but happily they contented themselves with the bowl of lemon-punch at the other end of the conservatory.

I sat down in the Roman chair which stood at the side of the window-seat. I balanced the slipper on the palm of my hand. Funny, isn't it, how much a woman will put up with rather than walk about in her stockings. And I wasn't even sure that she had lost a slipper! I wondered, too, where all her dancing partners were.

"You say you do not know me," I began. "Let me see,"—narrowing my eyes as one does who attempts to recall a dim and shadowy past. "Didn't you

wear your hair in two plaits down your back?"

"That is regular; it is still the custom; it proves nothing."

"Let me recall a rambling old garret where we used to hold wonderful shows."

Her fan opened again, and the tendrils at her temples moved gently.

"Once we played the *Sleeping Beauty,* and you said that I should always be Prince Charming. How easily we forget!"

She inclined forward a bit. There were signs of reviving interest. She began to scrutinize me; hitherto she had surveyed and examined me.

"Once—"

"Say 'Once upon a time'; all fairy stories begin that way."

"Thank you; I stand corrected. Well, once upon a time you fell down these same garret stairs; and if you will lift that beautiful lock of hair from your right temple I shall see a scar. I am sure of your identity."

Unconsciously her hand strayed to her temple, and dropped.

"Whoever you are, you seem acquainted with certain youthful adventures. But some one might have told you these things, thinking to annoy me." Then the light in her eyes grew dim with the struggle of retrospection, the effort to pierce the veil of absent years, and to place me among the use-

less, forgotten things of youth, or rather childhood. "No, I can not place you. Please tell me who you are, if I have ever known you."

"Not just now. Mystery arouses a woman's curiosity, and I frankly confess that I wish to arouse yours. You are nearly, if not quite, twenty-four."

"One does not win a woman's interest by telling her her age."

"But I add that you do not look it."

"That is better. Now, let me see the slipper," holding out her hand.

"To no one but Cinderella. I'd be a nice prince, wouldn't I, to surrender the slipper without finding Cinderella!"

"In these days no woman would per-

mit you to put on her slipper, unless you were her husband or her brother."

"No? Then I have a much perverted idea of society."

"And,"—passing over my remark, "she would rather sit in a corner all the evening."

"But think of the fun you are missing!"

"To be frank with you, I am not missing very much fun. I was at a dance last night, and the novelty begins to pall."

"At least, then, you will admit that I have proved a diversion."

"It will cost me nothing to admit that; but I think you are rude not to tell me right away who you are."

She looked out of the blurred windows. Her profile was beautiful to contemplate, and perhaps she knew it.

"Why don't you seek a footman," she asked, after a pause, "and have him announce that you have found a slipper?"

"Have you no more regard for romance than that?"

"You said that I was twenty-four years old. I have less regard for romance than for propriety."

"There you go again, battening down the hatches of convention! I am becoming discouraged."

"Is it possible? I have long since been."

She had always been a match for me.

Enter upon the scene (as they say in the play-books) a flurried partner, rather young and tender to be thrown in company with twenty-four years of sparkling femininity. Well, that was his affair; I didn't propose to warn him.

"Oh, here you are!" he cried, brightening. "I've been looking for you everywhere,"—making believe that something was the matter with his gloves.

"Do you know this gentleman?" she asked quietly, pointing to me with her fan.

I felt a nervous tremor. I wondered if she had been waiting for a moment like this.

The young fellow held out his hand; his smile was pleasant and inquiring.

"Wait a moment," she interrupted wickedly. "I am not introducing you. I am simply asking you if you know him."

Wasn't this a capital revenge?

"I . . . I can't say that I ever saw the gentleman before," he stammered, mightily bewildered. Then all at once his face grew red with anger. He even balled his fists. "Has he dared—"

"No, no! I only wished to know if you knew him. Since you do not there is nothing more to be done about it."

"But if he has insulted—"

"Sh! That's not a nice word to hear in a conservatory," she warned.

"But I do not understand."

"It is not necessary. If you do not take me instantly to the ball-room you will lose the best part of the dance."

She rose, and then I saw two little blue slippers peeping out from under the silken skirts.

"You might have told me," I said reproachfully. "And now I do not believe any other Cinderella will do. Young man," said I, holding out the slipper for his inspection, "I was just paying this lady the very great compliment of thinking that this might be her shoe."

"And it isn't," she returned. "Now, in honor to yourself, what is my name?"

"You are Nancy Marsden."

"And you?"

"Your humble servant,"—bending.

"I shall soon find out."

"It is quite possible."

And then, with a hand on her escort's arm, she laughed, and walked (or should I say glided? It seems a sacrilege to say that so enchanting a creature walked) out of the conservatory, leaving me gazing ruefully and mournfully at the little white slipper in my hand.

Now, where in the world was Cinderella?

## II

I thrust the slipper into the tail of my coat, and strolled over to the marble bench which partly encircled the fountain. The tinkle of the falling water made a pleasant sound. Ten years! I had been away ten years. How quickly youth vanishes down the glimmering track of time! Here I was at thirty, rather old, too, for that number; and here was that pretty girl of fourteen grown into womanhood, a womanhood that would have stirred the pulses of many a man less susceptible than myself. That she was unmarried somehow made me glad, though

why I can not say, unless it be that vanity survives everything.

I had been violently in love with her; at that time she hadn't quite turned six. Then I had lorded it over her tender eighth year, and from the serene height of twenty I had looked down upon her fourteen in a fatherly, patronizing fashion. As I recalled her new glory the truth came upon me that she was like to pay me back with interest for all the snubs I had given her.

Off to Heidelberg and Bonn and Berlin! Student days! Heigh-ho! Ten years is a long time. I might still have been an alien, an exile, but for my uncle's death and that the lonely aunt wanted a man about. (Not that I was

much of a man to have about.) In all these ten years I had not once visited my native land, scandalous as it may seem; but I had always celebrated the Fourth of July in my garden, celebrated it religiously, too, and followed the general elections.

All these people (or nearly all of them) I had known in my youth; and now not one of them recognized me. There was a pang in this knowledge. No one likes to be completely forgotten, save the absconding bank-clerk and the defeated candidate. I had made no effort to recall myself to those I met. My hostess thoughtlessly supposed that I should take on myself the labor of renewing acquaintance; but I

found this rather impossible. Everything was changed, the people and the city; the one had added to its height and the other to its girth. So I simply wandered about the familiar rooms summoning up the pleasant ghosts of bygone days. Then came the slipper episode—and Nancy!

Home again! No more should the sea call, nor the sky, nor the hills; I was home again, for ever and for ever, so I hoped.

And then I glanced up from my reverie to behold a woman, fair, fat and forty-eight, seat herself breathlessly on the far end of the bench. I recognized her instantly: she had been one of the salient features of my child-

hood, only a little further removed than my mother herself. She was florid in her October years; twenty years ago she had been plump and pretty; now she was only pretty plump. But a rollicking soul beamed from her kindly eyes. So I bethought me of the slipper, dragged it forth, rose and approached.

"Madam," said I gravely, "are you Cinderella?"

She balanced her lorgnette and stared, first at the slipper, then at me.

"Young man, don't be silly. Do I look like a woman who could wear a little thing like that? Run along with you, and don't make fun of poor old women. If there is any Cinderella around here I'm only her godmother."

For a moment I stood abashed. Here was one who had outlived vanity, or at least had discovered its worthlessness.

"Have you no vanity, madam?" I asked solemnly.

"If I have it has ceased to protrude. Go and give the slipper to a footman, and don't keep some girl hopping around on one foot."

I was almost tempted to tell her who I was.

"Madam, there was a time"—I began.

"Oh, yes; thirty years ago I might have claimed the slipper; I might even have worn it,"—complacently.

"Please permit me to conclude: there

was a time when you held me on your knees."

"What?"

"It is indeed so."

"Confess, then, that you were properly spanked. . . . Heavens and earth, wherever did you come from?" she exclaimed suddenly. "Sit down beside me instantly!" And she called me by name.

It was the third time I had heard it that night. I had heard it so infrequently that I liked the sound of it.

"And it is really you?" pushing me off at arm's length the better to observe the changes that had taken place. "You grow more like your father; if you hadn't that beard you would be the ex-

act picture of your father when he married your mother. Oh, what a pretty wedding it was!"

"I shall have to take your word for it. I was up and about, however, at the tin anniversary."

"I remember. Oh, but what a racket you made among the pans!" She laughed softly at the recollection.

"I was properly spanked that night," I admitted.

And straightway we uncovered thirty and twenty years respectively.

"By the way," said I carelessly, "is Nancy Marsden engaged to be married?"

"Nancy? She never will be, to my idea. She recently turned down a real

duke: a duke that had money and everything."

"And everything: is that castles?" I inquired.

"Nonsense!"

"Well, between you and me and the gate-post, Miss Nancy will be engaged within two months."

"No!"—excitedly.

"It is written."

"And to whom, pray?"

"It's the woman's place to announce an engagement. But I know the man."

"He is worthy?"

"Oh, as men go."

Then the water-clock in the fountain struck twelve, and I sprang up.

"Mercy, I'll never find any Cinder-

ella at this rate. All is lost if she escapes me."

I kissed her hand gratefully, and made off.

I immediately ran into a young miss who, judging from her short dresses, was a guest on sufferance, not having "come out" yet.

"Are you Cinderella?" I asked, with all the gravity I could assume.

"Thank you, sir, but mama will not permit me," her cheeks growing furiously red.

I passed on, willing to wager that the little girl had understood me to ask her to dance with me.

How I searched among the young faces; many I saw that I knew, but my

confounded beard (which I determined to cut the very next morning) hid me as completely as the fabled invisible cloak. I wondered where Jim was—Nancy's brother. I had seen him in Europe, and I knew if he were anywhere around there would be one to clap me on the back and bid me welcome home. This prodigal business isn't what it's cracked up to be. . . . Somehow I felt that within a few days I should be making love again to Nancy; and I may truthfully add that I dreaded the ordeal while I courted it.

What if she refused me in the end? I cast out at once this horrific thought as unworthy a man of my address.

Under the stairway there was a cozy corner. Upon the cushions I saw a dark-haired girl in red. Now, when they haven't a dash of red in their hair I like it in their dress. She was pretty, besides; so I stopped.

"Pardon me, but won't you tell me if you are Cinderella?"—producing the slipper.

"I am,"—she said with an amused smile.

"Then there *is* a Cinderella, after all?" I cried joyfully. "Where are the pumpkins?" glancing about.

"I believe that several of them have gone hunting for the slipper."

I was delighted. Three witty women all in one night, and two of them

charming. It was more than a man had any right to expect.

"You have really and truly lost a slipper?"

"Really and truly; only I am *not* the Cinderella you are looking for." From under her skirt there came into view (immediately to disappear) a small scarlet slipper.

I was very much taken aback.

"Red?" said I. "Ah, I have it. The wicked fairy has cast a spell over the slipper and turned it white."

"That would simplify everything . . . if we lived in fairy-tale times. Oh, dear, there are no fairies nowadays, and I wonder how in the world I am to get home."

"You have the pumpkins and the mice."

"Only the pumpkins; it is after twelve, and all the mice have gone home."

"Haven't you an incantation?" I asked.

She stretched out her arms dramatically. "Be gone, young man, be gone!"

"Very good," said I; "but I am impervious to incantations of that sort."

"I wonder where the other Cinderella is?"—adroitly. It was quite evident that she wanted to be rid of me.

If I hadn't met Nancy—!

"Suppose I try this white slipper on your foot?"

"It is not a supposable matter."

"Would that I possessed a cobbler's license!"—sighing.

She laughed. "You wouldn't be half so nice."

This was almost the beginning of an enchantment.

"If you will turn your head toward the wall I'll try on the slipper. I am curious to learn if there is a girl here who has a smaller foot than I."

"Vanity, vanity, all is vanity!"

"'Tisn't vanity; it's curiosity; and maybe my foot is getting cold."

I took some pillows and piled them on the floor. "How will this do?"

"Since I can not have the slipper I shall not move. Besides, I am sitting on the unshod foot. Hadn't you better

sit down here beside me and give an account of yourself and what you have been doing all these ten years?"

"You know me?" genuinely astonished.

"But you do not know me?"

"No; it's a terrible thing to admit, but I do not recognize you."

"Don't you remember Betty Lee?"

"Betty Lee? That homely little girl turned into a goddess? Small wonder that I didn't recognize you."

"My girl friends all say that I haven't changed a bit in ten years."

"Envy, malice, jealousy! But it is odd that you should recognize me and that Nancy Marsden should forget me."

"I used to detest you; we forget only those we love."

Enter one of the pumpkins, a young fellow about twenty. Hang it, I was always being interrupted by some callow youth!

"Here's your confounded shoe, Bett. I've had a deuce of a time finding it." He tossed the slipper cavalierly into her lap.

"Young man," said I severely, "you will never succeed with the ladies."

"The lady happens to be my sister," —haughtily.

"Pardon me!" — contritely. "I should have remembered that sisters don't belong."

The girl laughed and pushed out one

of the pillows. Then she gave me the slipper.

"We'll not haggle over a cobbler's license," she said.

I knelt and put on the slipper. Only one thing marred the completeness of my happiness: the slipper wasn't a blue one.

The girl stood up and shook the folds in her dress, then turned coldly on her brother.

"You are a disgrace to the family, Bob."

"Oh, fudge! Come on along to supper; it's ready, and I'm half starved."

Brothers don't belong, either.

"I wish you luck with the white slipper," said Betty, as she turned to leave.

"Call on me soon, and I'll forgive all the past."

"That I shall." But I made up my mind that I should call on Nancy first. Otherwise it would be dangerous.

I stood alone. It rather hurt to think one girl should remember me and that the other should absolutely forget. But supper brought me out of my cogitations. So once again I put away the slipper and looked at my supper-card. I was destined to sit at table four. I followed the pilgrims out to worship at the shrine of Lucullus.

Evidently there was no Cinderella; or, true to her condition in life, she was at this moment seated before her ash-heap, surrounded by strutting and coo-

ing doves. Well, well, I could put the slipper on the mantel at home; it would be a pleasant reminder.

I found table four. There were four chairs, none of them occupied; and as I sat down I wondered if any one I knew would sit down with me.

A heavy hand fell rudely upon my shoulder.

"What do you mean, sir, by entering a gentleman's house in this manner?" demanded a stern voice.

I turned, my ears burning hotly.

"You old prodigal! You old man-without-a-country! You pirate!" went on the voice. "How dared you sneak in in this fashion? Nan, what would you do with him if you were in my place?"

The voice belonged to Nancy Marsden's brother.

"I have no desire to put myself in your place," said the only girl who *could* be Cinderella.

"I wouldn't bother about *his* slipper, not if he went barefooted all his life," said I.

And then, and then, and then! What a bombardment! How pleased I was! I was inordinately happy, and I didn't eat a thing till the salad.

"How could you!" said Nancy.

"But you didn't recognize me,"—with a show of defiance; "and I expected that you would be the very first."

"Cut off that horrid beard."

"To-morrow morning."

"And never wear it again."

"Never."

"Have you found Cinderella?" Nancy asked presently.

"No; but I haven't given up all hope."

"Let me see it."

With some hesitance I placed the slipper in her hand. She looked at it sharply.

"Good gracious!"

"What's the matter?" I asked.

"Why, this slipper has *never* been worn at all. It is brand new!" She was greatly bewildered.

"I know it," I replied; "I brought it myself."

Then how she laughed! And when I asked her to do it again she did, even more heartily than before.

"You will always be the same,"—passing the slipper back to me.

"No, I want to be just a little different from now on,"—inscrutably.

She gave me an indescribable glance.

"Give the slipper to me."

"To keep?"

"Yes, to keep. Somehow, I rather fancy I should like to try it on,"—demurely.

So I gave her the slipper.